

VIRGIL NEMOIANU

IMPERFECTION AND DEFEAT

THE ROLE OF
AESTHETIC IMAGINATION
IN HUMAN SOCIETY

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The Role of Aesthetic Imagination
in Human Society

Virgil Nemoianu



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400 West 59th Street, New York NY 10019, USA
Tel: +1-212-547-6932
Fax: +1-646-557-2416
E-mail: mgreenwald@sorosny.org

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INTRODUCTION

For some time now I have wanted to try to group and formulate in a brief and coherent way my views about literature and its role in human societies and history, which I have rather consistently expressed in diverse writings. This fortunate opportunity was provided by the Central European University and, more specifically by “Pasts Inc.” and its leader and animator, Professor Sorin Antohi, as a cycle of lectures in Budapest in February/ March 2004. The current book is a version of these lectures; it draws from a number of previous writings, but it also rearranges the material and provides additional formulations. My short introduction is meant to provide the reader with some background on my views with regard to two questions: what is history and what is literature. The answers given here do not claim to define absolute truths, but only to explain my own personal prejudices and doctrinal sources, and serve as an auxiliary to the chapters in the book.

First: Is there a history? Several types of answers to this question exist.

ONE: No, there is no history. What we have is a series of random events and facts, illogical, “full of sound and fury,” a great deal of suffering marked by occasional islands of freedom and/ or satisfaction. The future is impossible to imagine, it is totally open, based on unpredictable circumstances; the past is a collection of facts, and we are lucky if we know them even vaguely. This position, in my opinion, is not absurd; in fact, we sometimes even encounter it supplemented by a theological slant.

TWO: History is logically determined, a chain of causes and effects, inevitable, firm; it comes from somewhere and leads us all toward another point, a higher and happier one. This is not absurd

either, and many highly intelligent and wise people have directed their thinking along these lines. A great advantage of this mode of thinking is that it can be understood as a continuation of religious faith, or perhaps of scientific growth, or else of social development. Another great advantage is that it provides us with a lot of hope: things are not wonderful now, but we can say with great certainty that they will be much better at some point in the future, sooner or later.

We may, however, also turn to a THIRD mode of interpreting history, a more modest perhaps, but also more flexible. What if we were to say something of the following sort: looking at history, looking at our past and the present, we seem to recognize a certain outline, an approximately intelligible sketch. But this sketch is far from convincing; clear-cut progress is questionable; it is better to use words such as evolution or development, rather than indubitable progress. Even more: such an advance into the unknown seems to be determined by multiple causes, or else it can be interpreted in a great variety of ways. An abundance of strains and lines seem interwoven.

We can look at history in an almost *biological* fashion: the evolution of human behavior and the human mind from the primitive and archaic to the more sophisticated and complex. Or we can accept the *economic* point of view: modes of production and class power succeed each other and shape human attitudes and modes of thinking. Or we can accept the *Biblical* plot of human growth: from paradisaal perfection, through the catastrophic fall of the human race and all its terrible implications, but with a final and (perhaps) general salvation. Or we can think of this evolution as being almost computer-like, as an increase of *knowledge* in quantity and in quality, as the creation of more and more, newer and newer, networks, coping with the environment and producing new tools. Or we can think, like the *idealists* of the Romantic age, that human development is predicated upon the dialectical unfolding of the objective *Idea*.

I, for one, hesitate to openly proclaim a categorical preference for any one of these scenarios over the others. Yet, I am even more reluctant to declare myself a total relativist who believes that none of the above is satisfactory because none of them is *completely* sat-

isfactory. I would rather choose to formulate and interpret things historical as “over-determined,” that is to say as a texture of many intersecting lines: they play with each other, they influence each other, they fight with each other, at one point one seems dominant, at another point another, sometimes they collaborate, at other moments they are in conflict. This is my own, somewhat idiosyncratic, understanding of the term “cultural morphology,” which differs from the meaning attributed to it by other scholars and thinkers.

To turn now to the question raised at the beginning about literature, I would connect it with my previous considerations by asking: in the unfolding of history, what do we gain, and what do we lose, along the road? Or, to make the question even more specific: if we have an evolution, inevitably something is defeated and lost. If we have a historical development, it is imperfect. What happens to these elements of imperfection and defeat?

It is here that I would insert my understanding and definition of literature—indeed, of aesthetic imagination in general. I will try to show that literature is the science or discipline of imperfection and defeat; it is the domain of discourse that deals with the elements of imperfection, of defeat, of loss in human existence, and in social life. Indeed, it seems highly curious that all our fields of research and examination are devoted to subjects relating to different areas of truth and goodness, but overwhelmingly in their absolute and certain forms. All these fields, from philosophy and theology to chemistry and mechanics or sociology and biology, seek to formulate firm and incontestable truths. They all seek to improve and enhance human societies; they all endeavor to describe the reduction of human activity to its victories, its gains, and its absolutes.

However, in reality most of human search and initiative ends up in failure; most successes are at best partial in our real world; virtually all gains are accompanied by some kind of loss. Disappointment, whether individual or collective, is undoubtedly one of the most frequent affects in human life. Various kinds of suffering beset even the most victorious persons or groups; they are an integral part of any existence. The ultimate defeat of decline and death beckons to all of us. Is it not strange, then, that such a huge part of existence should not be endowed with its own area of orderly pre-occupation?

I will try to indicate in the pages that follow that in fact such a discourse of warning, of imperfection, and of defeat *does* exist and is highly effective, that it would have been impossible for human consciousness to function without it. This is, in my opinion, the role of literature inside the general economy of human life and the way in which it can, and does, help our species survive. If the impression is created that I am thus constructing just another defense of the humanities, so be it, although this is not my primary purpose here. My purpose is more descriptive than cautionary. The caution comes from aesthetic imagination itself, rather than from my examination of it. What I say about literature can be read as a kind of shorthand for the beautiful in general, although a detailed demonstration would require a number of qualifications and distinctions I am not in a position to undertake.

My *first* chapter will deal with some general considerations as to the functioning of the philosophy of history. I will try to show how the complex of the aesthetic/imaginative/literary intervenes in contrary, yet ultimately beneficial, ways to correct successive socio-ideological situations in world history. Here I introduce the concept of the “secondary” that will be used repeatedly as an auxiliary for the understanding of the dialectics of history. The *second* chapter is going to be concerned with the triangular relationships between religion/literature/politics, indicating the way in which these connections strengthen the argument about the nature and role of the aesthetic imagination inside the general economy of the human mind and history.

The next two chapters are illustrative of particular cases and are meant to serve as concrete examples of the more general theme. Thus, in the *third* chapter I will turn to the relationship between the writing of history and the writing of literature, according some place to utopia, as well as, again, to politically intermediate solutions. The writing of history resembles that of literature insofar as it is moderate and balanced in both development and conclusion. It thus differs from utopian writing, which comes closer to absolute formulations, and in which qualification and nuance are lacking almost entirely. Similarly, the *fourth* chapter will try to be helpful as a concrete illustration of the arguments put forward before it. Central Europe is presented as a historical-geographic area characterized, among other things, by a “learning ethos.” I make an effort to show

what East/Central Europe can contribute to the world community in this century. Simultaneously I will point out more what specific role imperfection plays here and, by extension, how this can have some validity in resolving the dilemmas facing us all.

Finally, the *fifth* chapter will not only draw some conclusions, but also enumerate some ways and reasons why literature was usually regarded as suspect in one socio-historical order after another, and often subjected to outright persecution—not only in the past, but in the present as well. Naturally enough, I hope nevertheless that a lucid, illusion-free examination of these matters will help many of us achieve a more balanced and serene view of the motivations of human affairs. A certain humility and awareness of our limitations ought to be a welcome corrective to the disputes in our lives and societies, now, and in years to come.

I should indicate here that the first chapter draws massively from my *Theory of the Secondary* (chapters 1 and 10); Chapter three derives to a great extent out of another book of mine, *The Triumph of Imperfection* (University of South Carolina Press); a good part of the second chapter appeared in “The Finer Grain,” a *Festschrift* honoring Mihály Szegedy-Maszák (Indiana University Press, 2003), while some paragraphs of that chapter were originally published inside an essay brought out in *Intercollegiate Review* (Fall 2002, 38:1); the bulk of Chapter four was published earlier in Holland, Romania, and the United States, and Chapter five uses some sections of the article “Loving and Hating Aesthetic Formalism” hosted by *Modern Language Quarterly* (May 2000, 61:1). I wish to profusely thank the Johns Hopkins University Press, the University of South Carolina University Press, the John Benjamins Publishing House, the Intercollegiate Studies Institute and Duke University Press for permission to use the materials first published by them. This is also an excellent opportunity to warmly thank Professor Sorin Antohi for encouraging me to organize this book, as well as Mrs. Mary Rakow and Ms. Linda Kunos for technical assistance in its production.

CHAPTER 1

A PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION

I

Any theory of the secondary has to be a theory of corruption, subversion, and decay. Historical progress is composed of human efforts towards the shaping and organization of reality. Historical progress is the domain of rationality, pleasure, and increase, where the supreme law is the law of subordination; details have to become parts of wholes, individuals parts of communities, and the environment and subjectivity must be harmonized for the sake of pleasure and according to the dictates of desire. The universe is reconstructed and unified over larger and larger areas. Evolution is meant as the embodiment of the good, and accordingly (if this is true) hypotactic strategies constitute the very substance of history.

The great paradox of historical progress, however, is that its unifying and subordinating procedures soon prove empty and later often prove terrifyingly self-destructive. They prove empty because details express a curious and stubborn aversion to being subsumed. They prefer to disappear, rather than to continue their life in the enclosures provided by the general theories of progress, much as native Americans died away when coerced into slavery. Modern peasantry, when “liberated” into the enclosures of capitalist systems, soon dwindled away. The animal and plant species of territories newly opened up to civilization began to die out. The cognitive and hedonistic ambitions of Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus soon tumbled down from the lofty and the sublime to the dumb and the brutish. The over-arching completeness of a philosophical construction (Aquinas, Kant, Hegel) was all too often disappointing in its leveling consequences and frightening disregard for smaller facts and contradictions. The progressive and liberating vision of the national community would turn into the numbing and violent practice of chauvinist hatred.

These two paradigmatic steps, the melting away of details under the pressures of subordination and the onset of entropic processes that lead to vast areas of stagnation or absolute stability, are closely linked. Homogeneity is closely akin to death. The most progressive impulses engender the most retrograde and desolate landscapes. One cannot emphasize strongly enough that in retrospect—for instance, after fifty or one hundred years—it is the “progressives” of the time who look dated or reactionary. The ideologues and writers who served most enthusiastically and identified most closely with the winning tenets of their age are the most likely to seem distasteful curiosities to later ages.¹ What was initiated as a struggle against the thick and monotonous soup of original indifferentiation—creativity as production of difference—leads time and again to surfaces of barren and uniform fixity, quite similar to those that history was invented to combat and transform.

A return to a posthistoric/prehistoric state is now (and has always been) a distinct possibility for the human race. However, it is not, and has never been, a necessary state of things, or a direction of development. This can be explained by the resilience of the secondary: heterogeneity and details. The heterogeneous exerts an internal pressure and a continuous effort towards paratactic arrangements. The capacious structures of order and progress are undermined and eaten up from inside; they crumble into ruins, thereby releasing the secondary and the details that they had subsumed. The paradox of uniformity and indifferentiation is now reversed, as in a paradoxical treatment of a paradox. While progress leads to cadaverous rigidity and uniform decay, reaction (through its return to disorderly variety) counteracts the dangers of progress and reestablishes the very possibility of vitality and survival, and indeed of progress itself. It can be said with some confidence that many small variants of this phenomenon can be seen in action in an impressive number of places and situations.

II

It is here that we can begin to point to the value of literature for human existence. The centripetal power of literature rests first of all in the aspiration of any discourse towards the status of literature,

that is, towards the privileged enjoyment of liberty, self-referentiality, and a putatively inexhaustible substantiality as expressed in multiple meanings and textual openness. Everything happens as if for ordinary discourse literary discourse would be a kind of anthropomorphic divinity: ordinary discourse tries to reach it as if it were a paradisaal or utopian state. Under normal circumstances this hidden fascination reveals itself in two primary shapes. The first is the one described by Jan Mukařovský as the aesthetic dimension inherent in any activity, the need for the professional and well-done, for proportion and reasonableness in any kind of human production, regardless of its practical purposes. This, of course, applies to written or spoken productions of all kinds—political statements, scientific presentations, legal or philosophical texts, and so forth.

The second is more specific. It is the tendency of various texts to become more and more literary as time passes. After 250 years or so, the purely revelatory and prescriptive text of the King James Bible became considerably more aesthetic: the struggle for new translations was largely a consequence of this movement. Vitruvius and Pliny, Burton and Darwin, even Newton and Kant, as well as Burke and Marx, began to acquire a literary status as soon as their practical effectiveness began to decline. But even less pretentious works—an Assyrian code of laws, the business letters of an Elizabethan family, a Medieval handbook of zoology, an investigation into psychopathy dating from the time of Napoleon, a nineteenth-century political pamphlet, or a Last Will and Testament from the American Civil War—easily yield a poeticality that we attribute to time, distance, or alienation.

As a lonely explanation, temporal distance condemns the cultural utterance to a purely passive and reified role that does not seem completely credible. An explanation that allows some vitality to the nonliterary text carries more conviction. The aesthetic potential of the text will transport it *naturally* towards literature, that is to say, towards the paradisaal verbality to which it had always already been attracted. This attraction was counteracted or held in check as long as pragmatic external functions and the imperatives of the principal were strong, but it obtained its natural and desired freedom when they grew weaker. Then the multi-referentiality of the text begins to grow, and its substance is dramatically enriched by disorientation

and alienation. As the text begins to slide toward the common pool of literary freedom and renewal, the secondary can be said to flower in it.

At this point, noticeably, the story of decay, sorrow, and subversion has become a story of liberation and enhancement, a story in which oppressive limitations are shown to be short-lived. The ambiguity of the literary, with its reactions against progress and its dubious moral and epistemological merits, comes to mind immediately, and several probing questions become almost imperative as we watch the carnivals and deconstructions in which literature constantly and gleefully engages.

What exactly is gained here? And what is the rationale for the resort to heterogeneous dispersal after the breakdown of some huge ethical, spiritual, or cognitive construction? Or, to ask the question in different terms, can we expand our conclusions about the power of the secondary beyond the realm of strict literariness into a view of human activities and propensities? Such a theory already exists, and its progenitor is none other than the very founder and baptist of the field of aesthetics: Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten.

Baumgarten did not dream for a second of challenging the pre-eminence and priority of rational aims and methods, as he repeatedly emphasized² (Par. 8). Furthermore, he did not proclaim the absolute autonomy and specificity of the aesthetic field, as aestheticians beginning with Kant (and increasingly so as time passed) were to do. Logic was the elder sister of aesthetics (“soror natu maior”—Par. 13). In fact, the customary topics of aesthetic discussion in the later eighteenth century, such as the beautiful and the sublime and harmony, taste, and genius, while present in Baumgarten’s essays, played a somewhat subordinate part. Instead, Baumgarten’s main purpose was to show that “aesthetic” knowledge is a legitimate, helpful, and perhaps indispensable adjunct to logical knowledge. It could function as a general epistemological theory on the non-mechanical arts, such as rhetoric, music, philology, and others.

In doing so, Baumgarten showed remarkable farsightedness: he reached out from present dangers to more remote consequences. His main worry was the substantial loss and discarding that occur in the process of penetrating reality and ofgnoseological stabilization, that is to say, during the progress of science and the rational

opening up of nature. Abstraction, he realized, is a throwing away (Par. 560),³ an abandoning and elimination of pieces of reality by an activity that purports to imitate and to render it mimetically. Rational mimesis or transcription is inevitably poorer than sensorial reception in its generous fullness, although it is more exact. Baumgarten (and some of his followers, such as G. Fr. Meier) even went so far as to postulate that men are endowed with an *analogo rationis*, a system of sensorial faculties that (taken together) can parallel or substitute reason. These would include wit (*ingenium*), penetration (*acumen*), memory, invention (*facultas fingendi*), judgment, anticipation ability (*expectatio casuum similium*), and physiognomic intuition (*facultas characteristic*).⁴

The argument Baumgarten put forward is plain: any *gain* in distinctness is accompanied by a *loss* in fullness and variety, and there is a kind of rough proportionality between gain and loss. Therefore, the lower cognitive forms (sense cognition) have their own importance and merit, often subsumed under the heading of *ubertas*⁵ (wealth of details, multiplicity, plurality), but they also imply other things, of which I will mention a few. One is the kind of microsignals or “petites perceptions” (as Leibniz had called them) that we receive subliminally or affectively, albeit below the threshold of consciousness. The other is the *fundus animae* (Par. 511), or realm of darkness, that is to say, the mass of associations, details, or connectives that lubricate and enable the functioning of abstractions and concepts. The multitude and richness of these sensory representations can create (paradoxically) a *perceptio pregnans*, a vividness, pregnancy, and power that differ from, but perhaps surpass the univocal pregnancy of the abstract.

Finally, in a strategic turn that seems amazingly modern, reminding us of the theories of Nelson Goodman, Saul Kripke, or Thomas Pavel, Baumgarten alluded to the creative efforts of authors to constitute heterocosmic or alternative worlds as an essential way of completing the desiccated and impoverished systems of rational logic. These are understood as worlds that can introduce us to a series of things that have not happened in our own worlds and they summarize the representations of alternative states of affairs.

The relatively minor function reserved for technical aesthetics in Baumgarten’s writings indicates that the intellectual framework he

developed can be used outside the world of art and literature. It applies to ethical and political action, when groups and concepts that are “backward” or marginalized have to be brought back into the mainstream, and prevailing patterns of progress consequently have to be altered. It reminds political theory that broad concepts must be qualified time and again, and gaps or contradictions accepted as facts of everyday life. It applies to economic and scientific activities, which are perhaps more inclined than any others towards simplification and streamlining: the careful consideration of “remainders,” or stubborn pockets of divergent facts, heterogeneous surfaces, and stretches of discontinuity abound and defy even the best-constructed theory.

Theories of science and technology and guidelines for economic practice are compelled to change continually, sometimes uneasily, in the face of the recalcitrance of an abundant secondary. The least contestable instance of the secondary’s impact remains human nature itself, in the relationship of the faculties. Reason, will, and moral purpose constantly witness the pull and tug of instincts and impulses, of irrational feelings and stirrings. They submit to these multifarious pressures or at least respond to them. Sexual and biological commands, as theoreticians from Freud to Edmund Wilson or Parkman would be the first to admit, are in turn redirected by the “secondary” local pressures of cultural-social models.

As for the devotees of political-economic determinism, they had to admit early on, with much chagrin, that the “superstructure” had its own autonomy and indeed could exert influence upon the “base.” This insight is confirmed from many directions. Authors of the Romantic age (such as Adam Müller) have been shown to derive their politics from the beautiful.⁶ Charles Maurras has been said to have allowed his political ideology to grow out of aesthetic views.⁷ The inextricable meshing of the political and the beautiful in the works of Novalis and Burke has been eloquently described.⁸ Irving Babbitt developed a theory of the “bad imagination” (for him, rightly or wrongly, Rousseauistic idyllism), which can deform and disorient a whole culture.⁹ Nor are such phenomena limited to one side of the political spectrum: more than once it has been observed that, in American circumstances, the allegiance to Marxism is based on emotional and imaginative factors, not on class interests or empiri-

cal judgments.¹⁰ More generally, the *topos* of microharmonic happiness could be used by the moderate left and the populist right alike to suggest a more just balance between community and individual.

III

We must now turn to the relationship between “principal” and “secondary” or victory and defeat. How do these ill-definable entities relate to each other? There are, undoubtedly, many ingredients that make up the relationship. The principal and the secondary coexist. The principal dominates the secondary. The secondary is antagonistic to the principal. We also notice a dynamic of mutual transformation, dependence, and reinforcement. All these relationships seem confusing, if rich, and we may wonder whether their meshing is so inextricable that any attempt to separate the strands will prove hopeless.

Conversely, it can be argued that the reservoir of the secondary receives archetypes and paradigms with great satisfaction, but not details. Whenever the principal is vanquished and reabsorbed, we may suspect that the secondary details and heterogeneous materials organized by, or incorporated in, it will entirely disappear. The principal is assimilated by the secondary, while the latter dies. In science, for instance, the original impulse—that is, the production of hypotheses and models—is imaginative and secondary before it objectivizes itself in facts and scientific systems. But when we look at what melts into thin air after a century or two, we find it is the “hard facts.” Models and hypotheses have better chances of surviving, albeit in the large reservoir of the literary discourse, stripped of their hegemonic pretensions of dominating reality.

Or is it perhaps the case that the details themselves are the principal? Sainte-Beuve may have thought so when he argued that, by the splendor of his style and the subjective vividness of his natural descriptions, Buffon had gained the right to affirm himself as one present at the creation.¹¹ And the Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga once exclaimed he wished he had more literary talent, so he could be a better and greater historian.¹²

When some modern theologians speak about a kind of indirect salvation by the extension of the Mystical Body and its beneficent solidarity with mankind as a whole, this also seems to have some bearing on the dialectic of principal and secondary. Thus Henri de Lubac argues, beyond von Balthasar's prudently qualified advocacy of Origenian *apokatastasis* (general salvation of all humanity, including sinners), that it is the relationship between "sufficiency of the insufficient" (less is better than more, although based on more) that ensures the completeness of the salvational work.¹³ This suggests yet another formal relationship between the principal and the secondary: the principal *as* secondary, and, in any case, the inevitable need for one another and the interlocking of the two.

A possible guide in this confusing landscape of relationships can be provided by the concept of *recessiveness*, which was first developed inside biological science, but was extended in an ingenious philosophical manner in a little known work by Mircea Florian.¹⁴ Recessiveness is defined in this extended way first by distinguishing it from similar concepts, like complement, parallelism, correlation, and contradiction. Recessive duality is a kind of relationship in which the terms involved are not "isosthenic" and "isothymic" (equal in power or value), but in which there is a dominance and prevalence of one over the other. The two terms are opposed, but not contradictory; they coexist in a condition of inequality. The "recessive" term is secondary and dependent, but a certain tension is maintained between the two; they do not negate each other as dialectical thesis and antithesis, nor do they merge in each other, as in, for instance, a Hegelian synthesis. Thus "generality" is recessive towards "individuality," "form" towards "matter" or "content," "the absolute" towards "relativity," "knowledge" towards "existence," the "irrational" towards "reason," and so forth.

In the above examples and many similar ones, the recessive term is not cancelled out, or even debased or demoted. As a matter of fact, Florian argues that in certain ways the recessive term might be thought of as "superior," at least in so far as it provides a foundation for the principal and dominating one. Be that as it may, the important fact is that in all really crucial oppositions of being, synthesis is unavailable, while tensional coexistence is the rule. The basic asymmetry or inequality in the makeup of our world is not

something that can disappear, because—even assuming that here or there one recessiveness or several among them could ebb towards obliteration—it is impossible to see this happening everywhere. What this kind of inequality engenders is unity and diversity without the fusion or melting of synthesis; recessive inequality is tantamount to a respect for existence.

Florian's conception is itself heavily weighted towards the heterogeneous and the diverse, which—ironically—he regards as the principal, while order, unity, simplicity, persistence (substance), the *a priori*, transcendence, and necessity are all recessive terms, thus placed on the level of the secondary. But the actual choice of terms seems less important to me than the relationship itself; the relativity of hegemony, the possibility of reversal, the cohabitation of two different values or existential poles, the dignity of the secondary preserved, the mutual need of both sides, and the impossibility of uniform equality in consciousness and reality are all important features that help us understand how the secondary relates to the principal.¹⁵ They manage to supplement the aesthetic epistemology of eighteenth-century post-Leibnizians like Baumgarten in crucial ways.

The outlines of a theory of the secondary can thus include two chief parts. One deals with the relatively ordered confederation of nuances, details, and secondaries. It explores the changing relationships and patterns inside an aggregate of shades and transitions and, with melancholy glee, the rotting and disappearance of all kinds of principal constructs and hegemonic claims. It discovers with approving fascination the absorptive and redemptive abilities of imperfection and digression.

The second part deals with gleaning. Movement, advance and progress in this world seem to be inexorably entropic. This is true for natural evolution and for cosmological development, no less than for socio-historical progress. Every step forward seems inevitably accompanied by a lessening of substance, by a discarding of potentialities, and by a closure of options. It is much less clear that such steps forward are also able to open up new possibilities, at least not at a pace that would make up for their loss. In a way, “nothing” is richer and more open than “something”; certainly the very first step of “something” is endowed with all the potentialities of the future, while the next one is slightly less open.

The same can be said of the third step compared to the second. Why does the whole process not shut down soon? Why does an entropic lull, a mortal peace not seize reality? It is here that the reactionary nature of the secondary and the stubborn recessiveness of reality come into play. Full, unimpeded, and linear progress is the shortest way to stagnation and death. This movement is hindered, delayed, and in fact blocked by reactive gestures of creation. These gestures of reaction (a new trend in literary criticism, a philosophical construction, a political party, an economic empire, and many others) themselves soon become the target of subversion as they pull towards new horizons of progress and thereby of closure. Entropy is thus averted through reactive creativity and gleanings of the past.

It is beyond my philosophical abilities and knowledge to offer more than this intuitive sketch of the general process. But I hope to have been more persuasive in showing that literature, in its relations to society and to history, plays precisely this role. It tends to collect what is abandoned and discarded—language, human typologies, ideas—and with willful disassembling gestures reintroduces them, stirring up the complacencies of orderly progress. It is on this second part of the theory of the secondary that I would like to dwell a little further—first somewhat more theoretically, then by dealing with illustrations. The historical role of literature is, after all, what we are dealing with here.

Thus we can ask, first, if there is any active solution for those who are apprehensive of untrammelled modernization but have no illusions about our ability to stop this process and replace it. Modernization itself can be looked upon in many different ways. Perhaps it is chiefly an economic and technological advance that, in its sheer materiality, steers the actions and thoughts of our species towards a new stage in its general evolution. Perhaps it is consequent upon modes of cognition that, in their logical links, lead to emancipation and compel human beings to adopt behaviors and construct their lives in ways radically different from earlier times.

Nor are these possibilities incompatible with the image of humanity stepping more deeply into the Logos and ridding itself of the static cyclicities of natural mythologies. None of the above possi-

bilities is contrary to the idea of human freedom and autonomous will, since, despite the necessity of evolution, they all seem to lead towards an ever-broadening space for individual decision. A discussion about the essence of modernization—whether it is one or the other, or a combination of all of the above, or of any number of others—is of the highest importance. But no matter what its outcome, if any, the question of the uncertain and frightening fruits of this movement, the mourning of losses, the apprehensions for the future, and the abruptness of the alternatives will remain major concerns.

The plunge from sensual concreteness towards an area of luminous abstraction, from chthonic coalescence to airy indeterminacy, will not be slowed or modified by awareness of the causes or knowledge of the motion; on the contrary, it will probably be accelerated and simplified. At any rate, this academic and philosophical debate is entirely distinct from the question asked earlier about practical behavior: how to respond to this type of dynamic, how to handle it and ourselves.

In view of all the hesitations regarding modernity, it seems to me that our glances should be directed neither forward nor backward, but as often as possible *sideward*. A focus on the secondary first of all enjoins a digressive attitude, a roundabout way of movement, the use of indirection and the resort to meek slyness. Temporary derailments, gentlemanly leisure, dwelling upon the details, the whimsical absurdity of capers and escapism, dreamy lingering by the side of the road, and many other retarding strategies all provide a digressive alteration of the motion forward that cannot and does not want to stop it, but might perhaps lead to a decisive change in its nature. What happens is that the principal is no longer stripped of its own secondary, but is compelled to engage in countless local tensions with it and to move ahead, burdened by additional and distracting matters. To use a military metaphor, the human person engages not in total warfare against the principal, but in guerilla raids, whose purpose is to hinder and slow down, not to crush the foe.

Not less important is the gleaning gesture—the return and the salvaging, the short run back in one's tracks, quick and frequent shuttling between past and present, temporary and playful changes of perspective—all ways of responding to the pressures of progress,

easy to undertake and surprisingly efficient (or should we say cost-effective?) in alleviating these pressures. The important thing to keep in mind is, again, a distinction: the strategies of the past for responding to the real or imaginary dangers of progress were predicated either on wholesale restoration or on revolution, though in an etymological sense (the two are virtually synonymous). An awareness of the secondary urges us to deal with the same situation in an entirely different manner. It will tend to engage us not in large-scale operations, but in numerous small recuperations, local actions, and alterations.

From this perspective, the problem is not to impede progress, but to reestablish the kind of complexity that can indeed disappear because of the speed and linearity of progress. Recessiveness is (also) maintained by an awareness of recessiveness. Reaction in its purity is a kind of progress, irrespective of its direction. It is “progress” by virtue of its symmetrical relationship to it and by sharing speed, precision, and the simplifying (and thus entropic) energies with it. By contrast, the local recuperations and tensions of the secondary almost seem to assume that changing environments and the direction of change are matters of some indifference, provided there is in each environment enough complexity left to allow for some untold minimum of elbow room, complexity, or maneuverability of options.¹⁶

When Candide, at the end of his misadventures, concluded that cultivating your own garden is the best choice of action, was he being bitterly sarcastic, mildly ironic, or earnestly pragmatic? Voltaire himself never accepted Candide’s advice, but seemed to have been willing to allow a little room for his character’s viewpoint. We may wonder whether the Platonic tradition, in accepting the Beautiful as part of its Trinitarian combination with the Good and the True, was not in fact willingly undermining their totalizing certainties, and therefore setting up its own proclamation of the secondary. When Louis Dupré (in the wake of many mystical traditions, Western and Eastern) extols the merits of stillness, silence, and integrative contemplation, he is siding with other attempts to slow down immanent forms of absolutism.¹⁷ When Oakeshott extols immersion in professional *praxis* and the struggling embrace of the material detail, he is pointing to an escape from the leveling

pressures of the “principal.” The hard scientist can speak up in favor of “human imperfection,” or C. S. Peirce’s “contrite fallibility:”

To a very considerable extent and the more the human being recognizes his own limitations, the more complex and sophisticated his data-processing development. The two outstanding examples of this relation appear in the principles of “uncertainty” and “complementarity” in which ambiguity is enshrined in modern physics.¹⁸

The dialogical principle that was widely employed in Jewish and Christian theological philosophy by Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Ferdinand Ebner, Gabriel Marcel, and others (before being applied to literary criticism by M. Bakhtin and his followers) in many ways resembles the recessiveness of the secondary described above.¹⁹ There is no need to continue the enumeration of related phenomena and theories here.

Using the concept of the secondary, I maintain, opens new doors not observed inside other frameworks. The dialogic principle, for instance, is merely paratactic, and can well be regarded as a source of skepticism and stagnation. Admitting the secondary is an admission of creation and progress, as well as a plea for completeness and justice in epistemological and historical life. It accepts defeat and imperfection and makes room for them inside existence as a whole.

The emphasis on the secondary is perversely an alternative kind of progress; progress turned upside down, so to speak. Yet attention to the dialectical movements of the secondary is perforce an attention to the attachments of *praxis* and reality, an addition and a sustaining of them against what Heimito von Doderer called substitute systems that would subvert and replace reality. The often-evoked reactionary is impossible to separate from anti-entropic creativity: it is meant to be defeated or to originate fertile stalemates, according to Paul Claudel’s keystone conviction that God’s design and command for His human creation is not to obtain victory, but to ward off defeat.

The most natural state of mankind, we have to say, is imperfection. The horrors of the last few centuries and at least a few of the earlier ones arose largely from the pursuit of perfection and victory.

Rational acceptance of imperfection is difficult, but by no means impossible; indeed, it can be exciting and surprising in its own way. Likewise, defeat does not have to be shameful. It can be honorable, even glorious.

Others who have reflected on the nature of literature have tended to explain its conservative nature in terms of its ordering and organic inclinations, or else in terms of pastness and retrospection.²⁰ Both points are well taken. The ordering and organicity of literature are an attempt to counteract the imperatives of goodness and truth and their concomitant obligations to uniform movement and conforming gestures. The very special way in which multiplicity and local textures are subsumed to unity sets art apart from progress.

Similarly, pastness is an important aspect of the discussion. The heroes and leaders of the Middle Ages and of Antiquity were small in stature, ugly, and often deformed: look at the Bayeux tapestry, at preserved skeletons, and at the size of armors surviving in museums. Furthermore, these leaders were treacherous and unstable, cruel, suspicious, and irascible. Their followers were few, their successes or feats were niggardly, and their aims mediocre. In the face of such realities and achievements, the great epics and dramas concerning them seem like so much empty boasting and ridiculous flattery. The value of these great literary works lies elsewhere: namely in the addition of pastness. The signified is altered from individual to human by adding retrospection to reality. The past is seen as past, liked as past, and established as such with defiant courage in the face of the present and the future. Defeat and imperfection are saved, even cherished.

While such forms of reaction are inherent to the literary act and its harmonies, they ignore the other side of reaction, the hidden labor and the relentless lure of the secondary mapped out in these pages. Far from relying on erective and harmonizing energies, the secondary finds artistic expression through disorder, relaxation, and idleness. Negligence, tolerance, and procrastination are its allies, lack of energy and purpose provide it with strength. Literature as the secondary in society and history is a preservation of defeat, and thus a force for renewal. Since every progress can be true to its name only at its very inception, the defeat of further advances can only be seen as a beneficent strategy, the condition for a new inceptive progress.

It does not matter whether this very special kind of conservatism must be regarded from the viewpoint of retrospection, of organic harmony, or of the anarchic dissolutions of the secondary, because they amount to the same position. The academic profession in the 1980s and in the West, racked by the desire to further progress, was bound to express misgivings about the institution of literature. It is baffling to watch the widespread co-option of the deconstructive impulse (which was meant to impede, dispel, or lighten the pressures of the principal) by academic critics, and its stern yoking to prevalent ideological dispensations; these constitute a marked victory for the forces of leveling and conformity.

The same conformity is tacitly at work in diverse popular proposals: the meaninglessness of all texts, the abolition of aesthetic value, the modification of literary canons for beneficent social purposes, the turning of literature into an adjunct of social studies, the equalization of consumer objects with literary texts, and many others. What they all have in common is a jittery apprehension in the face of the havoc the reactionary energy of literature can wreak. Fighting the authority and the privileges of a literary canon is very rarely an act of rebellion and liberation. It is almost always an attempt to level and repress the recalcitrance and uniqueness of the aesthetic, to wipe out the secondary, and to impose a mercenary subordination on literature.

It is better to accept frankly the nature of literature and to come to terms with it, rather than to build huge clunky machineries for hiding and compensating for unpleasant realities. Literature may be obstinate, and it usually is, as is Ionesco's Béranger in the rhinoceros world of uniform colors, severe countenances, and thundering hoof beats. It will never be and usually does not try to be, victorious, being content with the adjunct role of grumbling, objecting, qualifying, keeping open doors, envisioning possibilities, and nursing dreams. Despite the posturing of many of its practitioners, literature is at bottom a gentle and persistent source of relaxed imperfection and smiling defeat. In turn, the vital gift of ever-renewed, ever-temporary defeat is one of the most charitable and precious endowments of the human creature, the faithful spring of our gallantries and hopes.

IV

As promised, let me now turn to some more specific literary examples to illustrate this broader philosophical-historical argument. The great authors of the twentieth century are considered political reactionaries, and justly so. There have been many who have expressed conservative ideas or even placed themselves on the side of fascist trends: Pound, Eliot, Yeats, Faulkner, Wyndham Lewis, D. H. Lawrence, Evelyn Waugh, Heidegger, Benn, Thomas Mann, Céline, Jouhandeau, Giraudoux, Claudel, St John Perse, Borges, Gombrowicz. Others have preferred to reject the modern world wholesale so that their position is in effect even more radical: Kafka, Beckett, Ionesco, Robinson Jeffers, Giono. There are also those who either found it wise to change their original leftist positions or else came to regret them: Auden, Dos Passos, Malraux, Camus, Mayakovsky, Essenin. There are still others whose leftwing views seem a bit suspect, having conveniently secured for them a maximum of social influence and success: Sholokhov, Sartre, Böll, Grass, MacLeish, Argezi. To use Lionel Trilling's considered and melancholy words:

If we name those writers who, by the general consent of the most serious criticism, by consent too of the very class of educated people... are thought of as the monumental figures of our time, we see that to these writers the liberal ideology has been at best a matter of indifference. Proust, Lawrence, Joyce, Yeats, Mann (as novelist), Kafka, Rilke, Gide (also as novelist)—all of them have their own love of justice and the good life but not in one of them does it take the form of a love of the ideas and emotions which liberal democracy, as known by our educated class, has declared respectable.²¹

Is the twentieth century markedly different in this regard from other literary periods? Not at all—it would seem that the situation is similar to that of other epochs. Most great literary figures over the centuries have arranged themselves resolutely on the side of what, in their age, stood for conservatism: Aeschylus and Aristophanes; Virgil and Horace; Dante and Shakespeare; Dryden, Racine, and Corneille; Pope, Swift, and Dr. Johnson; Goethe and Scott; Balzac

and Tennyson; Manzoni,²² Baudelaire, and Dostoyevsky—the list is endless. Similarly, conversions to the right (Wordsworth, Coleridge) and substantial ambiguities (Voltaire, Milton, Rousseau) abound.

It is fair to say, on the basis of empirical evidence, that literary production and literary producers are preponderantly on the conservative side and have always been easily used by it. The often-invoked critical function of literature is real. But a close scrutiny will show that nine times out of ten the criticism is directed at incoming and renewing trends; only much later is this writing turned by readers to reverse effect—typical cases are Gogol and Fielding. Even these situations are more than offset by those few “progressively aligned” writers whose work soon comes to have a stabilizing and pacifying effect unintended by them, for example, Defoe, Shelley, even Rousseau.

How did society respond? A few examples will suffice. Plato’s rejection of the poets and the severe limitations he imposed on acceptable forms and topics are justified by a higher moral and social purpose: progress towards the good society and maintenance of it. While in one place relatively innocuous claims for education by literature and the need for a strict measuring of value are put forward, social and political measures (mild, but firm) are also clearly demanded: exile of most poets, the suppression of many forms of art.²³ Similarly, different anti-literary offensives by Western organized religion (in all its branches) were always justified in the name of progress towards a higher spiritual fulfillment. The Puritan attacks on theatrical art in England began in the sixteenth century and continued all the way into the eighteenth; they were successful for a while under Cromwell’s Commonwealth. Gogol destroyed his last work on the advice of an Orthodox priest, and Byzantine iconoclasm had its hidden anti-aesthetic component, connected perhaps with the disfigurement of ancient Greek statuary by some early Christians. In the Catholic Medieval West, nonreligious literature found only grudging toleration.

Finally, the twentieth century’s secular totalitarianisms did not hesitate to resort to widespread bannings and burnings in the name of progress. This type of activity was not limited to the twelve years of the Nazi regime or to the seventy years of the Communist one, but was foreshadowed during the reign of terror of the French Rev-

olution, which imprisoned Sade (as had the *Ancien Régime*, and as the Consulate would again) and liquidated Condorcet and Chénier, besides dismissing the larger part of French literature. In fact, any society and any regime confident of their justness and secure in their sense of the good will find literary and artistic creativity an irritant, even a *skandalon*. Literature and art do not fit in with human order: they partake of irrationality and randomness, and surprise, rejection, and dispersion are part of their very essence. More importantly, as shown, they do not seek victory and perfection, and are thus sought out for punishment and persecution.

The best explanation I can think of arises from the fact that the nature of progress in art and literature is entirely different from that of historical progress. Roughly speaking, what a work of art does is to provide by its lights a genuine solution to the underlying historical crisis: an epic or idyllic or serenely comic work provides it directly, a tragic or satirical work does it indirectly, by contrast and positive implication. Literary theorists have formulated this idea in different ways. Viktor Shklovsky contends that the short story has two basic types of conclusion: opposition resolved and similarity revealed.²⁴ In both cases a circular movement links the end with the beginning (the kind of circularity that Armin Mohler attributes to any conservatism, as opposed to the linearity of progress). Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* speaks ultimately about the unifying myths of Literature as a world totality. The organicism of Staiger or Günther Müller no less than the "ironies" and "tensions" of such New Critics as Brooks and Tate are, in my opinion, ways of expressing the "holocleric" powers (to use Thomas McFarland's term) and needs of literature—the fact that it restitutes and reintegrates where history has pursued its unilateral aims. It recuperates what had been defeated, lost, or eliminated. In each case the literary work provides an ideal and fair answer to the oppositions and polarities on which a historical situation is founded.

The ideal literary answer is a "true" solution to the puzzles of a historical stage; it is in sympathetic solidarity with the anguishes and uncertainties of men, purifies them and stabilizes them, turns them into a "Grecian urn," as it were. This harmony and order are productive of historical disorder and social scandal: they are reactionary, not least of all because they are imperfect. The poets them-

selves recognize their opposition to history; thus when Hölderlin or Wordsworth complains of the loss involved in human growth and development, do they not refer to social history more than to the maturation of the adult? Instead of negating (as historical progress does), art combines.

The post-Hegelian aesthetician Theodor Mundt comes closest to this view when he defines beauty as the ideal form of what is each time vital immediacy or as a self-shaping of life out of its own substance.²⁵ Dialectical regularities are ignored; progress becomes a matter of indifference. Each work of art imagines itself as the end of the cycle, almost as the end of the world. *The Divine Comedy* does not need to be continued, it is a crowning. *War and Peace* is self-contained and secure, like a paradisaal existence. Nor does Joyce's *Ulysses* expect, or care about, a following. Fredric Jameson, in the wake of Adorno, explains very well that the great works (Beethoven's symphonies, Goethe's *Faust*, Tolstoy's *War and Peace*) have an implicit "utopian" (or self-enclosed) dimension in them, which makes them "classical."²⁶ In each of these cases imperfection is included, rather than being excluded.

Nor are matters made easier when we emphasize—as most of the modern critics do—the openness, indeterminacy, or ambiguity of the text. On the contrary: a totally open text is even more sovereign in its smiling indifference to the busy caresses and manipulations of the frowning, toiling, historically determined critic. In the 1920s Thibaudet already observed that the instructors lean left, the literati right.

It is here that the conflict with history emerges clearly. Historical development does not need ideal or autonomous answers; it needs empirical negations of the contradictions themselves. Thus literature is by its nature doubly "flawed." First, it contains an equal number of elements of the "old," in trying to strike a balance between the chief clashing ideologies of the age. (By *ideology*, I mean a theoretical formalization and justification of a sociopolitical trend, an intellectual discourse that, unlike a philosophy, remains intimately linked to actual historical drives, and cannot depart from them.) If literature is a compromise or a synthesis, as indicated above, then it is by nature a balance of opposites. Second—and more importantly—by the time literature appears, it is already out-

dated, or will very soon be, because historical movement will have transcended the ideological contradictions to which it provides a solution.

The neoclassicism of Dryden, Swift, and Pope, like that of Racine, appears to freeze and crystallize a liquid and seething Baroque; it provides a sane and freely noble solution to the tensions of the seventeenth century: senses vs. reason, the lust for all-enfolding knowledge and power, the frustrated striving towards wholeness. But by the time *Gulliver's Travels* and *The Essay on Man* appeared, they were already "reactionary," precisely because they brought the answer to the *previous* age. Their authors' problem was much like that of Virgil, Horace, or Corneille: these works were supportive of conservative authority, but at variance with the actual trend of the age it represented. The concrete historical development was resolutely turned towards pragmatism, individualism, empirical rationality, and gradual extension of the democratic sphere, whereas the "Scriblerians" rejected with a patronizing irony anything that did not conform to their answer: a synthesis or balance between individual man and social man, between experience and grace. While some of their contemporaries spurned or ignored them, others read them in a distorted way and selected from them those sides that were in keeping with the needs of the age: viewing Pope's Horatian adaptations as liberal irony was certainly quite a feat.

This was a deliberate choice of a single section out of the Scriblerian whole. Much later (in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries) in such exotic parts of the continent as Hungary or Romania, there were many readers who received Pope and Swift's work as somehow Romantic, individualistic, and thus highly progressive: they were choosing what *they* needed out of the synthetic answer of early eighteenth-century English writers.

V

That the role of the writer and artist in society is simultaneously that of a conservative and an irritant, was recognized long ago. Thus, in 1819, William Hazlitt, the great Romantic essayist, had occasion to speak about Shakespeare's Roman tragedy *Coriolanus*. Hazlitt, a

convinced champion of all liberal causes and a tireless voice of the left in his day, faced the dilemma squarely and honestly. He argued that Shakespeare *had* to write the play as he did, not chiefly for historical or political, but for literary, reasons. Whereas rational understanding is a republican and democratic faculty, Hazlitt explained, “the language of poetry falls in naturally with the language of power.” “Poetry is right-royal,” he insisted, because it opposes leveling and political prescriptions; it exists by contrast and exaggeration. We do not need to agree with Hazlitt’s definition of poetry and imagination (they are perhaps too Romantic for most of us: “Its head turreted, crowned, and crested”) to see the merits of the argument. *Coriolanus* is reactionary because so is poetic imagination inside the concert of human faculties.²⁷ For Hazlitt this is not a matter for either complaint or rejoicing, it is merely a matter of fact. Among the many faculties of the human mind and soul we find one that is different; it is there, one among many, but Hazlitt would have been horrified at the idea that this faculty must, or can be, extirpated. And Keats, who, for all his gentleness and devotion to poeticality, embraced (in life) radical views, exulted when he read Hazlitt’s argument: “The manner in which this is managed—the force and innate power with which it yeasts and works up itself ... is in a style of genius.”²⁸ (He exclaimed this in a letter after summarizing Hazlitt.) The finest dialectical mind among the English Romantics felt that, finally, here was a theory measuring up to their literary practice. Thus reaction (always doomed to defeat) found a rightful place in both mind and society.

Another illustration (to be picked up on again later) will here complete my point. Michael Oakeshott also speaks about poetry as one of the voices that can be heard in the “conversation of mankind.” It is, according to him, a voice of contemplation and enjoyment, as opposed to both virtue and knowledge, but it is even more completely opposed to the voices of desire, suffering, practical aims, and acquisitiveness. Clearly, for Oakeshott, poetry and art stand outside history and are opposed to it. He does not say that poetry is therefore “conservative” or even “reactionary;” rather, he implies that it is complementary to other human activities (activities that may or may not be more important than the contemplative and quietly joyful stance of the poet and his readers).

Nonetheless, this very quietness of beauty and the distance of contemplation will be irritating to the mind that seeks world improvement. There is, says Oakeshott, a conservatism that is based not on theory and reason but on habit and spontaneous conduct. This latter “natural” conservatism is best seen in non-utilitarian activities, such as fishing and poetry. “Familiarity is the essence of tool using; and insofar as man is a tool-using animal, he is disposed to be conservative.”²⁹ This is so because at the heart of professionalism, well beyond the aims of professional work, there is a structure, a conduct, an intrinsic disposition that engages our humanness itself and thus escapes rationalism, politicking, and the commitment to historical improvement. We can safely say that Oakeshott considers poetry to represent the most conservative inclinations of human nature. Irritating and scandalous it need not be, except in a state of affairs in which relational and modifying utility, virtuous rhetoric, and the love of purpose have decisively taken over. It should not be forgotten that imperfection is an indispensable aspect of any normality.

VI

As already mentioned, the Western attitude towards art as a whole is highly ambiguous. The points of the attacks from both right and left are oddly convergent; we can overhear the anxiety. What if beauty and *panache* reveal themselves as socially irresponsible, destructive of progressive order? The English *Cavaliers* of the seventeenth century, no less than the French surrealists of the twentieth century—Solzhenitsyn no less than Evelyn Waugh—pose such dilemmas. One can almost hear the cruel chuckle of Thomas Mann as he drives the point home:

Art will always “turn back,” it will always be reactionary. It is with good reason that it has always been included, like religion, among the anti-democratic forces; and to compare the artist with the “intellectual” is democratic humbug. Never will art be moral in the political sense. Never will it be virtuous; never will progress be able to count on its assistance. Art has a basically unreliable, treacherous streak; its delight in scandalous irrationalism, its love of that “barbarity” which produces

beauty is ineradicable. Even if one wanted to call this love hysterical, unintelligible, immoral to the point of endangering the world, it remains an immortal fact. And if one wanted to, if one could extirpate it, one would both be freeing the world from a grave danger and ridding it of art.

Is Mann teasing the reader?³⁰ If so, what he is teasing is our own lack of perspective on progress and historical reality. When we proclaim that art is reactionary, we speak in a slightly exalted tone of voice, heightened by a touch of shrill irritation. It is only fair to require that we stay in the same stylistic register when we talk about the antagonist—about history. In that tone of voice we would be entitled to say things such as: If all literature is reactionary, then all history is infamously decadent.

The present state of the West has often been compared, and properly, to the declining Roman empire, but what other society, even the best, was *not* decadent? Elizabethan England was well conversant with fear and the death wish; Medici Florence was tortured and violent; Periclean Athens was trembling and endangered; the ethical dilemmas of nineteenth-century England have often been exposed. It would be superfluous to call as witness the corruption of Byzantium, the exploitative vulgarity of Alexandria, the brutishness of the Dark Ages, the slaughters of the Two Roses.

In both high and low periods, at least some of the elements represent a decline from a former state. The sardonic Chajm Breisacher in Mann's *Doktor Faustus* masterfully deflated each golden age and projected its image to an earlier one; for him each shelter of conservatism was a kind of decadent phase of some earlier primitive greatness. Let us take his ironies seriously for a moment. If he is right, what has stopped history from reaching total annihilation? There are many different counteracting motives. In a truly dialectical view, one that would shun the linear dialectics of the Hegel–Marx tradition, reactionary pressures would be seen as a very healthy factor, invested with necessity and surely also saving history from speeding towards the inevitable decline that follows from the unfolding of historical potentials and their reduction to much narrower actualities. Literature should be seen as one of the forces in history counteracting the entropic drive toward decline.

Ultimately, the purely political expression in literature is of little consequence. The trivial literature of any age is habitually subservient to the age's ideologies, slogans, and passwords. Nevertheless, by an effect of distancing (itself intrinsic to literature and inevitable to it) the better literature (and thereby recognizable as better) unmasks and subverts its own prevailing ideology. In doing so, it provides for the preservation and transmission of values, for keeping the historical process open, as well as for thickening the texture of cultural existence. To achieve this, literature must be engaged in a series of complicated local dialectical stratagems, must undermine historical processes in the most irritating fashion, and must proclaim alien and reagent ideals. Yes, this will almost always be a losing battle, but like delayed time bombs, these decentralized dialectics will illumine the structures of the future precisely because they preserve and reorganize the imperfections of the past.

VII

In eighteenth-century England, a new political system was being established, and a new social class was firmly in control: industry and trade, individual merit and rationalist transactions, and legal liberties and the pressure towards democracy were the distinguishing features of the new covenant. Whatever we may think of that system and class now, two and a half centuries later, it is impossible to deny that it was at the time the progressive force, the one pointing towards the future. But what about those (few, perhaps) who noticed early on what is in retrospect painfully obvious—namely the blemishes and the deep contradictions (some of them merely potential, not fully actualized at the time) of the new system being installed?

It is clear that some immediately caught on to these defects and contradictions because of their dogged attachments to older continuities. But, unlike Pope and Swift, Addison and Fielding were sincerely convinced of the usefulness and value of the new dispensation. In Augustan England, it was observed, the men of letters were usually Catonian *frondeurs*. In these and in other cases the critique

came from within, even while the process was unfolding. Commercialism and intellectual pride, ruthless expansionism, imposition of values and standards, dismissal of emotional and imaginative faculties, different breaks with nature, and many other symptoms were detected and dramatized with gusto, in ways that were helpful both to contemporaries and to posterity.

Can we point to similarities in our own time? A new class and a new system seem to be emerging at the advanced points of our now global society: it encompasses an industry of information, communication media, data production and data processing, and a class dealing with the structuring of consciousness and the perception of the outside world. By any standards of measurement, this new mode of production is more advanced and progressive than the older capitalist and socialist structures of the industrial world, let alone the feudal, tribal, or patriarchal formations still surviving on vast areas of the globe.

Technological control of nature (including the capability of harming it in various, and perhaps decisive, ways) and the absoluteness of communication, as well as a continuous stripping of bonds pointing towards alienated and randomized individuality, provide opportunities for both hope and despair. But do we encounter the same criticism from within the new order that, in the case of eighteenth-century England (or of other historical configurations that could be easily cited as examples), was of such benefit and, perhaps, one of the great merits of the age? Apparently not, or not yet, although one may confidently predict that the writers who have the best chances for the future are those who can establish the most fruitful kind of dialectic and tension between themselves and the emerging order, without entirely rejecting it. As Calvin Brown once said:

A lost cause has always been better for literary purposes than a victory. Priam slain at his own altar while Troy burned about him, the Spartans at Thermopylae, Roland at Roncesvals, the Nibelungs in Etzel's hall, Njal burnt in his house... these things are predestined legends. The British won a great victory at Waterloo, but their language took the losing side, so that a Waterloo is not a victory, but a defeat.³¹

Inside history, the history of literature has a small but important role: it takes the losing side and redeems it or recuperates the losses; it deals with defeat and abandonment. An emerging order that believes it can dispense with this kind of help, and this genuine opposition will cast grave doubts on its own validity and beneficence and will soon see itself threatened with irrelevance or revulsion.

Notes

1 The theories of Lombroso are a good example. See John Caiazza in *The World and I* 2 (1987), no. 1:583–84. Another random example is the comparison of the Jesuit Michel Letellier's view, expressed in 1687, that studying Chinese culture is in itself a worthwhile pursuit, with Alfred de Vigny's proclamation in 1847 that the pride of the new age was the weeding out of barbarity: Americans hunting Seminoles, Russians the Caucasian tribes, the English the Chinese, and the French the Arabs. See Henri de Lubac, *Catholicisme* (1938; reprint Paris: Cerf, 1047), 252.

2 A. G. Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, 2 vols. (50–58); comments and partial German translation in Hans Rudolf Schweizer, *Ästhetik als Philosophie der sinnlichen Erkenntnis* (Stuttgart: Schwabe, 1973). The other work relevant to our discussion is *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus* (Halle, 35); a modern reproduction with English translation, commentaries, and a study in K. Aschenbrenner and W. B. Holther, eds., *Reflections on Poetry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954). Quotations and references in the text after *Aesthetica* by paragraphs, as is customary.

3 Cf. Ursula Franke, *Kunst als Erkenntnis* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1972), 107. The example provided here is that of a stonecutter, who can obtain a marble sphere out of a block only by ruthless elimination of solid material. Baumgarten asks: "Quid enim est abstractio, si iactura non est?"

4 Franke, *Kunst als Erkenntnis*, 51.

5 Mary Gregor, "Baumgarten's 'Aesthetica,'" *Review of Metaphysics* 37 (1983), 2:364a. To think beautifully, we must think richly, Baumgarten suggests in *Aesthetica*, par. 115, as well as in his *Meditationes*.

6 Franke, *Kunst als Erkenntnis*, 96.

7 Eugen Weber, *Action Française: Royalism and Reaction in 20th Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 8–16. Cf. A. James Gregor, *Young Mussolini and the Intellectual Origins of Fascism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979).

8 Paul Gottfried, "Ideologische Ästhetik: Kunst und Politik bei Burke und Novalis," *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 19 (1974), no. 2:240–52.

9 Claes Ryn, *Will, Imagination and Reason: Irving Babbitt and the Problem of Reality* (Chicago: Regnery, 1986).

10 Frederick Crews, "Dialectical Immaterialism." See also Leonard Wessell, *Karl Marx, Romantic Irony, and the Proletariat: The Mythopoetic Origins of Marxism* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1979); Leonard Wessell, *Prometheus Bound: The Mythic Structure of Karl Marx's Scientific Thinking* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1984). An earlier article still worth reading is Wylie Sypher, "Aesthetic of Revolution: The Marxist Melodrama," *Kenyon Review* 10 (1948):431–44.

11 C. A. Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries du Lundi* (1851; reprint Paris: Garnier, 1853), 4:277.

12 Nicolae Iorga, *Materiale pentru o istoriologie umană*. (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1968), 5. In an essay written in 1940.

13 Henri de Lubac, *Catholicisme*, 194–95.

14 Mircea Florian, *Recesivitatea ca structură lumii* (Bucharest: Eminescu, 1983). Only the first volume of this posthumous work has been published so far.

15 "The dichotomy universal/particular is too simple. *Tertium datur*: relations that link change with continuity, difference with similarity" says Claudio Guillén, and, quoting the Basque philosopher Fernando Savater, "The discourse of violence is established on a principle of universal indifference: all is the same, if it isn't what I want. Any gradualism, any distinction or relative preference is a form of complicity with absolute evil. ...This annihilation through contempt for shadings is exactly the opposite of the differentialist task of love, which consists of finding the unrepeatable where objectivity could only discover routine: parents listening to a child's first word, dawn shared by lovers," in "On the Uses of Monistic Theories," *New Literary History* 18 (1987), no. 3:513, 500.

16 François Guizot thought that a man's first duty in life was to submit to imperfection. Cf. Ernest L. Woodward, *Three Studies on European Conservatism* (1929; Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1963), 216. The importance of a decentralized political life was rarely pleaded more eloquently than by Chesterton and his distributists. For an excellent brief critical assessment, see Michael Novak, "Saving Distributism," *Chesterton Review* 10 (1948), no. 1:13–34.

17 Louis Dupré, *The Other Dimension* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972).

18 Harley Shands and James D. Meltzer, "Unexpected Semiotic Implications of Medical Inquiry," in *A Perfusio of Signs*, ed. Thomas Sebeok (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 80.

19 For an overview, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, 4 vols. (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1973–1979), 1:587–604.

20 Thomas Fleming, "The Uses of Diversity: Recovering the Recent Past," *Chronicles* 10 (1986), no. 19:8–24.

21 Lionel Trilling, *Beyond Culture* (New York: Viking, 1965), 166–67. Among those who have written of this twentieth-century phenomenon, see Alastair Hamilton, *The Appeal of Fascism* (1971; reprint New York: Avon 1973), John Harrison, *Reactionaries: A Study of the Anti-Democratic Intelligentsia* (New York: Schocken, 1967), and some articles in the *Journal of Contemporary History* 2 (1967), 2.

22 We often hear the scandalized voices of later readers. One example among a thousand is Elio Vittorini clamoring against Manzoni. See *Manzoni pro e contro*, ed. Giancarlo Vigorelli (Milano: Istituto di Propaganda Libreria, 1975–1976), 2:619ff.

23 Plato, *Nomoi*, 657b–661d, 667a–670c; *Politeia*, 398a–403c, 605c–608b. For a useful review of anti-literary reductionism from Plato on, with emphasis on classical

studies, see William B. Stanford, *Enemies of Poetry* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980).

24 Viktor Borisovich Shklovskii, *Sur la Théorie de la prose* (1929; reprint Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1973) and Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 80–85.

25 Theodor Mundt, *Aesthetik. Die Idee der Schönheit und des Kunstwerks im Lichte unserer Zeit* (Berlin: M. Simion, 1845), 54–57, 64–65, 74–77.

26 Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 38–59, 318–40. “A successful work is not one which resolves objective contradictions in a spurious harmony, but one which expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradiction pure and uncompromised in its innermost structure,” Theodor Adorno, *Prisms* (London: NLB, 1967), 32. My argument line here differs from that of Roland Barthes, who has occasionally declared literature reactionary (see his *Essais critiques* [Paris: Seuil, Tel Quel, 1964], 262–65), explaining that it inevitably deals with language, not with reality. This is part of a discussion that dates at least from the Romantic age and that has been recently revived by Paul De Man, for instance, in his article “Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image,” in *Romanticism and Consciousness*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Norton, 1970), 65–77. The utopia of turning language into reality (Hölderlin’s “nun müssen dafür Worte, wie Blumen entstehn”) differs from another intrinsic “utopianism”: that of working on two different levels of reality. It is the latter that is dealt with here. Abstract and respected values of universal appeal (grace, balance, gentleness, traditional continuity, ecological kindness, etc.) are connected by Stifter in *Nachsommer* and by Evelyn Waugh in *Brideshead Revisited*, and even by Jane Austen in *Mansfield Park*, with specific historical environment or social class. The reader is supposed to eventually disentangle the level of empirical embodiments from the values proposed, although not for a while.

27 The Hazlitt reference in *Shakespeare's Coriolanus: A Casebook*, ed. B. A. Brockmann (London: Macmillan, 1977), 26–30. Hazlitt was responding (in 18) to an article by Henry Gifford.

28 *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 2:76.

29 Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics* (1962; reprint London: Methuen, 1981), 7–81. The essay in question, “On Being Conservative,” was originally published in 1956. The other relevant essay, “The Voice of Poetry in the Conservation of Mankind” (1959), can be found in the same volume, 197–247.

30 Cf. Hamilton, *The Appeal of Fascism*, 125. Thomas Mann, *Politische Schriften und Reden*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1968), 1:295. Even a convinced radical democrat like Heinrich Mann feels admiration for Napoleon’s dictatorial powers.

31 In a review in *Comparative Literature* 39 (1987), No. 4:356. A very valuable essay is R. A. D. Grant, “Jane Austen as a Conservative Thinker,” *Salisbury Review* 5 (1987), no. 2:43–48.

CHAPTER 2

**THE DIALECTIC OF LITERATURE
AND RELIGION**

I

To continue my argument, I will begin with a few points that reveal more clearly the general connections between literature and religion, and the relevance of this interface for the general theme of imperfection treated here. In particular, the following paragraphs are meant to provide a better understanding of this chapter.

The first of my assumptions is that a belief in transcendence is common to virtually all cultures known to us, whether major or small, recent or old. Of course, the idioms of communicating with transcendence, of explicating it, may vary widely from age to age, from area to area. It may seem that there are cultures or societies that, at certain given historical points, discard any kind of religiosity.

This is a mistaken interpretation. Thus, in the 1980s, more than one atlas or handbook of world religions presented the Soviet Union as a blank area, one where religion had been erased. However, within a dozen years or less it became obvious that this was simply not the case. The very same observers began to complain about the excessive power and influence of religion in the very areas they had declared totally atheistic. It was quite clear that it was only the *open* expression of religion that had been inhibited, that had been subjected to severe political and social taboos.

We should speak here about repressed or obscured beliefs, and situations where pseudo-religions begin to function. Some examples that come to mind are the later Imperial stage of the Roman Empire, the current situation in Western Europe (but not in the United States), different periods in the history of China, and perhaps a few others. These may also involve mistaken interpretations, because what we may call “secular religions” were dominant in those areas at the time. Therefore, on a cultural level there is always

an opening toward transcendence, or a kind of channel between immanence and transcendence. Transcendence appears as a possibility or an aspiration, which means, both pragmatically and semantically, that it is a form of reality.

What differs considerably is the *structuring* of religions or of this channeling with transcendence. I will, perhaps unfortunately, focus mostly on just the Biblical or Judeo-Christian forms of religiosity, primarily because of my relative ignorance of other religions, although I will occasionally refer to them; another reason is because my analysis in this little book has to do almost exclusively with the culture of the Euro-American area.

A humanistic kind of Christianity will be characterized by a number of features that bring it near to culture in general and to literature in special.

First, it will combine the horizontal and the vertical modes of communicating with the hypothetical transcendence. The horizontal one is somewhat pantheistic (or close to pantheism)—it assumes an omnipresence of sacrality; the vertical version sees sacrality as being totally different from immanence and prioritizes an individualist and subjective, unmediated connection between the person and otherness.

Second, it understands religion as a series of approaches and distancings between transcendence and immanence (saintliness, miracles, and different kinds of religion express such approaches; secularizations express retreats on both sides).

Third, in the case of Christianity we have an intersection in the figure of Christ, in Judaism an intersection in the ultimate horizon of perfection.

Fourth (more specifically in Christianity, more vaguely in Judaism), the Holy Spirit signifies both the persistence of tradition and the potential for innovation. Literary tradition and innovation function and relate to each other in a quite similar way.

Fifth, in Christianity the relational nature of Divinity, i.e., Trinitarianism, leads to the mutual production and engendering of the different persons inside God, but also to multiple relations to the world. Likewise literature is processual and relational, and is weakly determined. In Judaism (and to some extent in Islam) what we

have is an abundance of interpretation (Kabbalah, Midrash) that acts as a substitute to the multiplicity implicit in Trinitarianism.

Sixth, very specific to Christianity: the four-fold nature of the Gospels, the same kind of truth expressed in four different ways, all of them equal and yet different, sometimes even contradictory. This, in turn, is extremely typical of the literary manner of proceeding.

Seventh, the creative nature of Tradition. Simultaneously we can speak of change and movement forward, and of preservation or maintaining. Again, this is a feature encountered in literature.

Eighth, the actual growth of cultural activities and discourses out of religious impulses. Examples can be found in architecture, the teaching system (particularly higher education: in Christianity particularly, but also in Islam and in Judaism), the arts, and ultimately in literature. With respect to the latter we can speak, above all, about literary criticism (which can be said to have grown out of techniques developed for the interpretation of privileged sacral texts) and drama (the expansion of religious rituals: in polytheistic religions such as the Greek or African, in Japanese, and in Western Christianity, as well as other cultures).

Ninth, finally: narrativity. This can be seen in an exemplary way in Judaism, but again, very largely in polytheistic religions, in East and South Asian religions, in Christianity of course, in virtually all religions. It is one of the most powerful and broadest commonalities between literature and religion, as was eloquently demonstrated by Paul Ricoeur, among others.

I am not going to dwell at large on the other side of this coin, that is to say “*religion* and literature,” as opposed to “*literature* and religion.” Suffice it to say that inside Christianity, the theoretical issue was already discussed during the first few centuries of the Patristic Age. The names of Dionysus the Pseudo-Areopagite in the East, and of St Bonaventure in the West, are among the foremost of those who regarded beauty as the chief channel, or one of the chief channels, of communication between transcendence and immanence, or between God and humankind. This point of view was very powerfully put forward in Eastern Christianity during the second half of the nineteenth century by Vladimir Solovyov.

It ought to be added that in virtually all religions one encounters somewhat analogous positions. The concept of “*khabôd*” (a key

feature of God) in Judaism is characteristic for the manner in which it combines the values of power, faith, and radiance. It has also been argued in the framework of inter-faith discussions that an important bridge between Christianity and Hinduism might precisely be that of beauty.

I believe that the points enumerated above can indicate rather clearly how and why the religion/literature interface strengthens the argument for the “imperfectionist” character of literature. In its essence any religion, particularly the monotheist “religions of the book,” are constructions of hope; they deal with directions, efforts, and intentions, much less than with certainties and victories. Precisely this openness toward transcendence simultaneously means that immanence is imperfect, that it is merely a step along an arduous and lengthy road. Our conviction that literature and aesthetic imagination in general are modes of handling the universally human experiences of disappointment, failure, and partial success finds itself strongly confirmed by the analogies to, and kinship with, religion.

Let us now turn to a few more practical examples culled from political history before returning to literature.

II

The argument started above may be helpfully developed by adding a few reminders as to the connection between religion and politics, which emerged in its doctrinal and modern form at about the same time as the theorizing and examination of the aesthetics/sacrality interface—although, as far as I can judge, quite separately, and without mutual influence.

I refer here to Christian Democracy. It should be immediately mentioned and admitted that there are also other forms of this religion/politics interaction: some of them theocratic, anti-democratic, etc. It goes also without saying that over the centuries and the millennia all institutionalized, or, for that matter even non-institutionalized, religions have been involved in politics in one way or another, with each side making use of the other in various dialectical ways. However, I choose to confine myself for the moment, and

for this short comment, to Christian Democracy. Not unexpectedly, the term seems to have been coined during the French Revolution, by the Bishop of Lyon, Lamourette, on November 21, 91 in a speech before the French National Assembly. It was thereafter used by several journalists around 1848, as well as by high-level intellectuals, for instance Ozanam, Henri Bergson, and Jacques Maritain in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The latter went so far as to state that “democracy is merely a secularized version of Christianity.”

Meanwhile, however political movements dedicated to the defense of religious values had already sprung up in a number of Western countries. Thus, for instance, in what is now Belgium, a movement of this type emerged as early as the 1820s, followed by religious political parties in the 1840s in Holland, Sweden and Germany (the powerful and efficient “Zentrum” that survived until 1933), followed in the middle of the century or a little later by the formation of parties in Austria, Norway, even England (the leftist social-Christian movement of the novelist Charles Kingsley and, in the 1920s, the “distributist” movement of G. K. Chesterton and H. Belloc). These parties were mostly Catholic, but often Protestant in Northern Europe, and many of them survive in a form or the other up to the present day.

Among the loud and clear voices that provided doctrinal sustenance one might mention, in France, Chateaubriand, Lammenais, Guizot, and Tocqueville and, in Germany, Msgr. Wilhelm von Ketteler, and Adolf Kölping—all of these mostly during the first half of the nineteenth century. A very important source of support came when the Vatican, through several encyclicals (Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* in 1891, Pius XI’s *Quadragesimo Anno* in 1931, and more recently John Paul II’s *Laborens exercens* in 1981 and *Sollicitudo rei socialis* in 1988), expressed approval and support for these theoretical and practical political initiatives.

The first modern Christian Democrat party may be said to have been the one created by Dom Luigi Sturzo in Italy in 1919 under the name of “*Partido popolare*.” This was followed by the construction or reconstruction of analogous parties in most Western European, as well as in some East/Central European, countries. Eventually parties of this type, albeit with a more leftward slant,

appeared in some South and Central American countries, and other religions thought it might be a good idea to form political parties based on their own faiths. Israel is a typical example, but there are also some Muslim political parties (Indonesia, Malaysia etc), as well as the dramatically growing nationalist Hindu party in India. In the United States, while parties did not adopt the same name and title, religious dimensions can be easily recognized, for instance in the African American movements, and I have argued in an essay that George W. Bush Jr.'s current (2000–2008) Republican administration might be described as being Christian-Democrat in doctrine.

Is there common ground in programs among Christian-Democrat parties? Perhaps not consciously, but certainly some common denominators can be pointed out. In general there is support for the institutional Churches, as key elements of a healthy and coherent commonwealth. Stable and flourishing families are seen as indispensable. Laws governing divorces are restrictive, and abortion limited to the point of being banned in most of Western Europe, pornography is held to a minimum. Discipline in schools is deemed indispensable.

In the same part of the world (during the 1950s and 1960s in particular), the economic movement tended to be broadly liberal and relaxed, but laws and budgetary policies were crafted so as to protect and encourage smaller enterprises in agriculture, trade, and even industry. Legislation tended to protect working classes both insofar as their economic rights were concerned and (especially) in fields such as retirement, health care, vacations, and length of working hours. Simultaneously, a public work ethos was powerfully promoted, along with the sanctity of private property. The cultivation of spiritual and intellectual traditions was seen as desirable for the well being of the community in general. Consumerism, particularly in its more conspicuous variants, was frowned upon, though not absent. A moderate form of patriotism and respect for historical tradition were pervasive, one might say omnipresent; high-culture was considered a warden of the state, to be staunchly protected. Decentralization was formally approved, but more rarely applied: we might perhaps say that “intermediary structures” were preferred as local communities rather than as significant regional units.

This set of features was held together and vindicated by a number of firm political principles that, in my opinion, grant Christian-Democracy a status of true political *Gestalt* in the modern age. Some of the most important among these were the following:

Personal dignity was set up as the opposite of the atomizing individualism of liberal capitalism: it was the undergirding for the dogged struggle for the right to life, for preferential options for the poor and working people, for human freedoms and tolerance, and also for support of the community and certain judicious controls of the market.

Subsidiarity maintained the inalienable status of the family as the most important social cell and building block, local rights, the encouragement of numerous local forms of communitarian involvement, the choice of a diversity of federalist schemes.

The recognition of the human being as an imperfect creature implied the resolute refusal of utopian schemes, the reluctance to wage war except as an ultimate resort, a disciplined educational process, the emphatic and respectful presence of traditional values in all sectors of society, open admission of Divinity as the ultimate and enabling framework for human affairs.

Many of these features began to fade by the early 1970s and can be seen as marginalized or played down as of this writing, 30 years later. The decline of a Christian-Democrat polity is due to a variety of reasons. The inevitable mutability of human affairs is of course central. The pressures of what we can call the “modernization project” were efficient instruments of this mutation. The lack of flexibility and dynamism of the European system(s) also played a role. Nevertheless, in many areas (not least in the protection of unborn life) significant remnants of this past remain, and the doctrine as a whole remains robust. Even more significant is the recognition of central and enabling values, the consistent search for a fertile and genuine intervention of the spiritual in secular circumstances. The adoption of some of these views (explicitly or implicitly) by part of the North American electorate and its political elites should also be taken into account. The recognition of the enabling and central values of “middlingness” indicates a still-consistent search for the above-mentioned interaction of the spiritual with secular circumstances.

Before drawing some conclusions as to the meaning of these historical and ideological developments, as well as to their connection with the literature/religion interface from which we began, it is appropriate and important to explain in some detail the very nature of this interface.

III

What do all these somewhat discontinuous examples from different fields demonstrate in terms of our general thesis? First of all they indicate the very intricate relations between religion and all branches of culture, whether literary or political. The attempt to obscure or to eliminate the opening toward transcendence of human beings and societies seems spurious, indeed rather infantile. A more adult position would be to accept it as a fact of life and to handle it in a responsible way, befitting the complexity and weight of the issue. Secondly, we have the opposite side of the coin. All these examples indicate a rather limited degree of human success in all its strivings and aims. These limitations derive from the attempt to *codify*, perhaps even to institutionalize, the structures of human effort and in particular the religious/civilizational interfaces discussed above.

Political endeavors under the aspect of religion tend to be modest and hesitant, falling short of triumphal success. Inside culture we recognize a certain distance from religion: the two find themselves in a state of inconsistent parallelism (we have found, not surprisingly, cases of approach and cases of distancing); we are ready to think of *co-existence* rather than of a process of *merging*. The two levels, the transcendent and the immanent, have each their own specific kinds of speed and modes of advance. They interact, yes, and it is fair and necessary to realistically take into account their interaction, but we should not go beyond the acknowledgment of this interaction, or beyond a normal kind of mutual accommodation.

In addition, we are reminded almost every day, or even almost every minute, that the purely secular modernization initiated by the eighteenth-century Enlightenment contained impressive accomplishments that few if any of us are at bottom willing to forfeit.

At the same time, we are each of us aware of the shortcomings of this historical situation at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century. Critiques of the present are grave, substantial, and enormously frequent, coming from left and right, North and South, East and West, from the more privileged and the underprivileged, from sophisticated intellectuals no less than from the less educated; it would be futile to enumerate here all, or any, of these critiques and dissatisfactions, as they are all too obvious, and the rosy optimists have not much of a case to make. Yet we are equally unwilling (in truth, and in our overwhelming majority) to relinquish our globalizing and modernizing gains for the sake of our irritations and angers.

This is precisely the point where the function of an honestly admitted defeat and a modest recognition of imperfection, as provided by our aesthetic imagination, intervene in a healthy and beneficial way. When expressed by “mere” literature and art, and if expressed *only* by them, the temptation to dismiss them might be powerful. The fact that, behind them, we recognize the enormously powerful and durable background of the quintessentially human dimension of the religious suddenly provides a much more convincing belief in, and explanation for, the organization of human affairs.

In the West the complicating factors increased (we can say this with almost chronometric certainty) once the Viscount of Chateaubriand’s cornerstone work on *The Genius of Christianity* (1800) was launched and became a European-wide bestseller. In this work, as in others, Chateaubriand eloquently argued that a renewal of religion (particularly after its general decline in the eighteenth century) can be imagined only by switching from the mostly theoretical (epistemological) and casuistic (ethical) approaches of the Scholastic and the Counter-Reformation ages to an emphasis on the mysterious beauty and design of nature, and perhaps also of human history.

This position was enthusiastically embraced by many in the aesthetic community (creators and audiences alike) and, more importantly perhaps, was gingerly accepted by adversaries of the Faith, agnostics, atheists, worshippers of science. It seemed to draw some boundaries and to propose a kind of balance: this territory belongs to

rationality and utilitarianism, whereas the other belongs to emotion, the ineffable, to imagination. While many Catholics and Protestants considered that they had won a victory, their opponents regarded the loss of the aesthetic realm as a small price to pay, when they considered that they could more easily banish religion from their own vast fields of human endeavor and cognitive research.

In the nineteenth century, despite numerous frictions and “border conflicts,” this truce was on the whole maintained, albeit often grudgingly and somewhat unhappily. It is only after the middle of the twentieth century that we can notice new beginnings of strife, along with attempts to reorganize the relationship between religion and literature in a closer way. The main reason seems to be the following: around World War I we notice a number of tenacious efforts to establish the bases of a “science of literature.” Generally the attempts were made by starting from some neighboring discipline: linguistics (structuralism and formalism); psychology (biographical and psychoanalytic approaches); sociology (Marxism and other socio-historical methods, including later “power theories”); and yet others. While some scholars and critics held steadfastly to *one* of these disciplines, many others showed more flexibility and declared that literature is *par excellence* a domain in which we recognize the interaction and collaboration of *many* branches of human action, behavior, and discourse.

The consequence of this latter definition was the following: if we can allow inside literature a comfortable space for many fields of human discourse, then why should we eliminate *religion* from among them? Why not look for a theoretical explanation of the function of religion inside culture in general? Clearly, because this would infringe upon the “peace conditions” established in the early nineteenth century. When we reach the most recent period, we find that, even though often banished from the mainstream of literary criticism, a vigorous movement dealing with the interfaces of literature and religion emerged in the United States, in France, and elsewhere.¹ As a result of these debates we can observe a certain sharper profile of religious/literary intertextualities that, until recently, had been accepted with little difficulty, albeit in a blander way.²

The fact remains, however, that between these two fields open spaces remain that have not been carefully examined. I will now try

to do two things: firstly, to present briefly two models of sophisticated methodological approach to the issue of relationships; secondly, to discuss ways in which the above-mentioned "open spaces" might be better organized.³

IV

Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988) is perhaps the most profound and widest-ranging Catholic thinker in the second half of the twentieth century, a fact that is only now, slowly, beginning to dawn upon readers.⁴ This is not the place to talk about the zigzags of his reputation inside ecclesiastical politics, nor about his truly enormous theological and Church-historical work. I will confine myself to some general points he raises in sometimes excruciating and overwhelming detail in two major studies, *Herrlichkeit* and *Theodramatik*.⁵

Herrlichkeit is a work that purports to approach the numinous, not from the point of view of the good or the true, but rather from the point of view of the beautiful. The title word carries a large number of connotations, such as glory, splendor, lordliness, radiance, or the sublime, but its central meaning is presented in Volume 3 of the work: it is the Aramaic *khabôd*, the divine attribute that is essential in the Hebrew Scriptures. The analysis in that volume is continued by a sub-volume devoted to the New Testament. (A volume from a more ecumenical angle was also planned, but never written by Balthasar.) These investigations are preceded by studies of the problem in the history of metaphysics, as well as in the work of twelve poets, mystics, and theologians. Among them are St Bonaventure, Dante, Pascal, Hamann, G. M. Hopkins, Solovyov, and others, each of whom, according to Balthasar, tried to elaborate a version of a theological aesthetic.

Perhaps I should mention here that the author's position (throughout his career) was Patristic and Neo-Platonic more often than scholastic and neo-Thomistic; in fact, he was occasionally and unjustly accused of Gnosticism. In any case he seemed to deal primarily with cases in which the ineffable, the visionary, even the imaginary were foregrounded.

What is interesting for the literary scholar is Balthasar's argument that the process of religious understanding and the process of literary meaning formation present huge areas of analogy, particularly in the dialectic of the subjective and the objective. According to him, in both areas subjectivity organizes and crystallizes the factual reality that is its target and center, while the apriorically absent objectivity channels and steers subjectivity. This process, true in religious search, is, for Balthasar, quite similar to "aesthetic necessity," where the being of a literary work seems to require its details, but at the same time this overall comprehension depends "always already" upon the existence of the work in its completeness. Religious knowledge and experience, no less than aesthetic knowledge and experience, entail forms of the collaboration of rationality with irrationality, chaos, solitude, and silence.

Balthasar also tests out other binary oppositions in literary and theological discourse. One of these is the relationship between *lumen* and *figura* (in other words the divine and the historical) in theological discourse with inspiration (or project) versus shape (or *Gestalt*) in literary-critical discourse. Another is the relationship between image and reality in the discourse of sacrality and in Trinitarian dialectics as analogous to the problematic of differing levels of reality on which we can place a literary fact. Balthasar believed that "mental forms that grew in the kind of surroundings in which beauty is also rooted, that is to say, halfway between a *Mythos* that deifies and sacralizes everything, and a *Ratio* that demystifies and secularizes everything, often come closest to the truth" (Balthasar 1961–1968, I, 637). He aligns himself with the old tradition that regards the Bible as *ars Dei*—a divine work of art (Balthasar 1961–1968, I, 637)—and he is convinced that Christianity is an ultimately aesthetic religion (Balthasar 1961–1968, I, 208).

Some of these propositions receive an even more pointed treatment in *Theodramatik*, which can be seen as a companion to the earlier work, presenting a number of theological tenets in their dynamic, rather than as a static picture: the referential level is drawn from dramatic literature and performance. As a matter of fact, the whole first volume of the five that compose *Theodramatik* is devoted to an analysis of theatrical mechanisms, and this analysis is thereafter consistently applied to some key aspects of salvation his-

tory, Trinitarian interrelationships, eschatological outlook, and the connection between the human and the divine. Predictably, Balthasar emphasizes that in his view the dramatic functions and operators are, at the immanent level, aspects and consequences of their transcendent counterparts.⁶ Thus he discusses human freedom as relative and as the upshot of absolute divine liberty (Balthasar 1975–1981, II, 170–305). Nevertheless, the fact remains that throughout *Theodramatik* it is the aesthetic categories of drama that are drawn upon and used to organize and illuminate the mass of theological information to be shaped.

Balthasar discusses, for instance, the relationship between person and mission (in the case of Christ, but equally in the case of every human being) by using the reference to character and acting and by investigating the way in which they have access to reality (Balthasar 1975–1981, I and II). Another good example could be his discussion of the nature of Trinitarian divinity, where he rejects both a transcendent-abstract conception (e.g., a Deist one), and an immanent-mythical conception of plural natural divinities. To explain his own mediating conception, Balthasar resorts to a trio of dramatic concepts and their application: author-actor-director (much as Goethe in his prologue to *Faust*). Historically, this analogy is expanded by another triad: audience-production-horizon, which is seen as a transposition of the first (Balthasar 1975–1981, I, 247–301 and II, 487–489).

A further example is furnished by Balthasar's highly useful examination of the dialogic principle (Balthasar 1975–1981, I, 31–34, 587–604).⁷ He shows that it is rooted in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Catholic, but even more emphatically, Jewish thinkers who had both secular and religious purposes. Among those mentioned are Ferdinand Ebner, Gabriel Marcel, Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, as well as, to a lesser extent, Hans Ehrenberg, Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, Karl Loewith, and Karl Jaspers. The dialogic principle (with its multiple sources in Romanticism, neo-Kantianism, *Lebensphilosophie*, and theology) can provide a flexible approach, and a wide humanistic horizon, for investigating the relationship between the transcendent and the immanent, or the numinous and the natural. In a symmetrical reversal, the dialogic model—which of course is dramatic and literary to begin with—

can return enriched from its philosophical and theological adventure to serve as a guide for our understanding of narration and the reading process.

In passing it might be said that Balthasar provides us with models of interdisciplinary study embedded in his major works. Thus the thematic essays on *theatrum mundi*, or the world as stage (Balthasar 1975–1981, I, 121–238), as well as the essay on holy fools in literature (Balthasar 1961–1968, III, 492–551) are models of their kind, which any comparatist might envy.

Even in his theological works, Hans Urs von Balthasar argues in favor of the need for beauty as a kind of borderline for the good and for cognition: it reins in its sisters by providing the kind of gratuity that imitates divine “gifting” on the human level.

V

Jean-Luc Marion, another theoretician rich in suggestions for fresh approaches to the discussion of the religion/literature interface, was born in 1946 and began his career with a bold dissertation on the “blank” theology of Descartes, i.e., he postulated a theology of absence in the work of the father of modern rationalism (see Marion 1981). This was, in a way, the foundation for several further book-length studies of a more unabashed intertextuality, of which I will refer only to the first, *L'idole et la distance* (Marion 1977).⁸ The book is composed of four essays on Nietzsche, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Hölderlin, and Heidegger. Marion seeks a vantage point from which the relationship between signifier and signified can become a truly productive one, whether for literary analysis, intellectual spirituality, or philosophical meditation. He thinks that shuttling with agility among these fields is of scholarly advantage, but at the same time emphasizes that it is the opening towards transcendence, incorporated and codified in the theological discourse, that plays a key role in the cognitive integration he seeks.

Marion begins, one might say, with an acute sensitivity to the analogies between separate lines of thinking. One of these is the modern school of absence and deconstruction, of radical skepticism and relativity, as illustrated (or “advertised” I should say) by Derri-

da, but prepared for philosophically by Nietzsche and Heidegger. The other is the long and powerful tradition of negative theology, also called the apophatic way. This theological tradition, one of whose first great and articulate representatives was the shadowy and mysterious Pseudo-Dionysus, and which reached a late culmination in the theoretical work of Nicolaus Cusanus and the poetical work of San Juan de la Cruz, claims that the approach to God can only be negation, the stripping of attributes and qualities: we can only say what God is *not*. Cusanus, for instance, concludes that God is neither expressible, nor inexpressible, nor both expressible and inexpressible; He neither is, nor is not, nor is and is not at the same time; He simply does not fall under the category of Being.⁹

We could mention in passing that apophatism is stronger in Eastern than in Western Christianity, and equally important, that it is by no means limited to Christianity. Examples that come easily to mind are branches of Buddhism, such as Zen, as well as some central tenets of Judaism, such as the refusal to voice the tetragrammaton indicating the name of God. (Marion refers only to the latter of these two examples.) In any case, Marion perceives the two traditions—modern skepticism and negative theology—as being related and convergent and as gaining through mutual illumination (Marion 1977, 191).

The key distinction proposed by Marion is between *idol* and *icon*. According to him, *idol* is an epistemologically local name or image of divinity (Marion 1977, 24–25). It refuses distance, and instead tries to approximate and stabilize transcendence and sacral-ity: the human experience of the divine requires precedence over the divine itself; the transcendent signified has to submit to conformity and reification. By contrast, the *icon* (his use of the term does not correspond to, say, W. K. Wimsatt's definition) tries to capture neither the human signifier, nor the divine signified, but merely the relation between the one and the other (Marion 1977, 25–27). It therefore manages to admit and incorporate distance and absence—the withdrawal of God. For literary discourse, the implications are momentous.

Turning Wittgenstein's aphorism upside-down, Marion claims that "*Ce qui ne peut pas être dit, ne doit pas être tu*" (Marion 1977, 232). At the same time, however, he not only approvingly quotes

Wittgenstein's view that words are just the "translation" of something preceding them, but expands this view to the relationship between reality and concept, the latter being the utterance of something that will, and does, remain inexpressible (Marion 1977, 27). Parallels to such a point of view could be found in the writings of some modern critics (from Barthes to Fish) regarding the relationship between social practice and language, or text and literary comment.

Marion regards Nietzsche's philosophical operation as a destruction of idols and the clearing of an anonymous space, which leaves room for an anarchic invasion of sacrality; conversely, the withdrawal of the divine and the creation of distance can be regarded as an ultimate form of revelation (Marion 1977, 114). In Hölderlin's poems and fragments, Marion discovers, first of all, a meditation on the retreat of the gods and on the absence of the Father. The simplest model for his analysis is a short letter to Hölderlin's mother sent by Hölderlin in the years of his mental breakdown. The brief note carries no semantic charge, nor does it contain any message. The letter is abstract and nude; it merely signals the vast distance separating the ill poet from a healthy and remote mother.

Marion believes that this type of relationship was already present in Hölderlin's poetry: the withdrawal of the gods is the most radical mode of divine presence, and the best kind of proximity is distance and abandonment. It is part of this divine concealment that its revelation is effected in the epistemologically weak and socially disenfranchised and poverty-ridden figure of the Son (Marion 1977, 148). Another chapter in Marion's book discusses Pseudo-Dionysius in linguistic terms, as a model for the type of discourse that can be used in connection with divinity and sacrality: erotic and encomiastic, as opposed to theoretical and epistemological. This serves as an introduction to a discussion—based largely on Heidegger—of the modalities in which God has no part in the ontic antinomy of being/nonbeing, but must be seen outside it (Marion 1977, 294).

Marion's greatest merit is therefore his articulation of an analogy between the categories of structural semantics (and poststructuralist philosophy) and the categories of theological discourse. Like Hans Urs von Balthasar, Marion does not seek the intertextu-

ality of the religious and the literary in object, imagery, and contents, but in something else. Each of the two areas covers a mass of meanings and objects to which organizing categories and interpretive lines are applied; it is this formal carving out, and the discourse principles behind it, that are considered legitimate partners in comparison and analogy.

One implication of this approach, which is by no means trivial, is that if opening to transcendence is a central trait of humanness, then aesthetic activity is the zone most closely neighboring the religious one. This line of argumentation is, of course, far from new: poets and thinkers, religious or not, had so claimed or argued much earlier. Nevertheless, it gained only shaky and grudging acceptance inside different religious systems and inside societies. That is why a set of more systematic, and yet more modest, claims regarding the connections between religious and aesthetic languages might be in order.¹⁰

VI

In order to organize all these kinds of interface between religion and culture, it would be best to enunciate *four* principles that can be widely acceptable.

The first and simplest: To develop what was alluded to in the introduction to this essay, the literature-religion relation is a legitimate and important object of study. In the same way that literature was and is being discussed in connection with philosophy, with politics, with history, with psychosexuality, with language, and with other arts—these being considered dimensions, sometimes motive forces, of the aesthetic—so a religious dimension as well cannot be ignored. Any intolerant attempt to suppress it must be firmly rejected, not only because such suppression is incompatible with the spirit of free research, but also because censorial violence leads to unwelcome “compensatory” effects, for instance the return of religious categories and attitudes in concealed forms.

Those who ought to be particularly supportive of this kind of interdisciplinarity are undoubtedly the sociological, historical and even Marxist critics—that is to say all those who strive for an

understanding of the true environments and determinations of a literary work. (One assumes it is easier for psychoanalytical and formalist critics to overlook the religious contexts and dimensions of authors and works, although in fact they do so less often.) It is important to repeat that *all* human societies known to us have displayed some concern with transcendent matters and openings. The greatest women writers of the Middle Ages wrote in the idiom of mysticism. As often as not, until 300 years ago in the West and more recently elsewhere, political conflicts and ideological debates were cast in the language of theological disagreement; indeed a closer look at the contemporary world discloses that religious motivations are quite a bit weightier than we would have predicted, or are comfortable with.

A generation or two ago, critics were asking each other how many children Lady Macbeth had, much in the spirit in which they nowadays ask themselves what the power relations were at the court of Louis XIV. These are worthy curiosities, but they will never allow us to find out as much about the scope or failings of a given cultural universe as inquiries into the religious horizons of Racine and Calderón, of Christine de Pisan, of Jonathan Swift, or of Amos Tutuola. In fact, a corollary of this principle is that the more somebody emphasizes the socio-historical dimension of a work, the greater and deeper the interest in religious matters must be.

The second principle. Hypothetical sectarian and confessional bias can be an object of concern, but only of moderate concern. Normally, divisiveness along ideological lines in the study of religious-literary interfaces ought not to be more serious than divisiveness along lines of political choice in the study of literature and politics. In the latter, a scholar subscribing to principles of classical liberalism will differ from a radical leftist in obvious ways, but this does not necessarily (or always) compromise the field of study. Similarly, an open discussion of interdisciplinarity with religion could only gain by a clear definition of points of view and assumptions; disagreement, here and elsewhere, can well have a bracing and healthy effect.

That some will regard Milton's or Blake's poems as debased and infected by their involvement with religious matters, while others will see them enhanced and exalted thereby, is less important in

this context than the hows, whys, and whats of an involvement that can be ignored only by a severe curtailment of the range of meanings present in them. In the case of Milton and Blake, the intermeshing of religion with literature is in fact rarely ignored, and the examination of the Scriptural implications in Milton's writings has of late become a flourishing branch of Milton studies. However, to take another pair of examples, Swift and Pope are much more seldom discussed in terms of their religious motivations and frameworks.

A better understanding of Swift's Augustinian roots and Pope's kinship with Molinist and Fénelonian ways of thinking could add a lot to our fuller understanding of these authors, even if the examining critic disagrees with those particular tenets. Similarly, I think that the positions of many authors from Rabelais to Diderot or from Shelley to Hardy could be better understood—whether we like them or not—through knowledge of the background structures (religious, even clerical) they were reacting against.

The third principle. Already at this point the field of study we are discussing appears organized along some main lines, and around some key topics.

(A) Imagery drawn from religious sources, typologies, ideas.¹¹ This can refer to: symbols, motifs, archetypal human figures and situations in general, but more narrowly, those that can be somehow shown to be mediated through a historically institutionalized religion rather than to belong to some common archetypal fund. This "thematic" kind of approach is not without its problems. It can (like every other critical approach) flatten out monotonously literary works and can discover its own starting assumptions in every text it investigates. Its potential disadvantages do not have to rule it out from among our objects of interest.

(B) Categories of sensibility. Here the above-mentioned traps are more difficult to fall into, even though the object of research is apparently vaguer and more ineffable. I have in mind not only virtually classical works such as those of Henri Brémond,¹² but, even more, studies linking, say, pietist and Methodist sensibilities with literary developments in the second half of the eighteenth century, or reformatory and counter-reformatory enthusiasm with the aesthetic events of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I would

contend that even the nineteenth and twentieth centuries here offer a vast field of interdisciplinary investigation that is underfrequent-ed, but can be very fruitful: from Kafka or Christina Rossetti to Willa Cather and Walker Percy.

(C) The treatment of purely religious texts with the analytical methods of modern criticism (structuralism, narrative theory, formalist methodology and so forth), a field that was virtually ignored in the past but has grown in the last twenty to thirty years.¹³ We have seen these methods applied chiefly to books of both parts of the Bible, and, in fact, to its first half more often than the second half.¹⁴

It is interesting to carefully consider the modes in which other sacred texts, in other religions, have been dealt with. We know that, in the remote past, epics of Amerindian cultures, or for that matter Homeric and Hesiodic texts, were endowed with religious status. This is rare or virtually impossible nowadays: such productions were absorbed into literature. A good number of Indian works (Vedic Hymns, Upanishads, the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*) may be regarded as literature (not only by Western, but also by sub-continental readers), even while segments of them continue to serve sacred and ritual purposes. As mentioned earlier, canonical books of Islam and perhaps other religions in Asia have not undergone the same process.

Similarly it might be interesting to discuss whether the large mass of “surrounding” texts—apologetic writings, canonized commentaries, hagiographical writing and others—can or should be treated in a somewhat similar manner, i.e., as objects of literary analysis, whether in prose or poetry.

(D) Without claiming to have exhausted the list of topics or lines of investigation I will mention here briefly the area of *discourse analogies*. Although the previous presentations of Urs von Balthasar and Marion may have been self-explanatory, we can nevertheless ask a few questions that are, in my opinion, of tremendous importance. To what extent are modern poststructuralist, deconstructionist, and relativist interpretations related to the family of casuist, Talmudic, Jesuitical, Gnostic, and heretical freewheeling and imaginatively associative theological discourses? One can study historically the transfer of philological and text-critical methods from bib-

lical literature to the writings of classical antiquity and from there to modern literatures in the vernaculars, a fascinating field hardly touched until now. Curiously, *adversarial* readings of theological and similar texts starting from Foucaultian, feminist, or other sources are encountered, but not very frequently (as opposed to attempts to distort Biblical texts in such directions).

More important than the above (and, in a sense, encompassing them) is the contribution of Biblical studies to the research of textuality and meaning. In fact it is a source of great wonder how the study of the emergence of meanings out of texts can ignore the one field—Biblical studies—where a huge experience of the kind has been accumulated over many centuries. Meaning-formation in this large specialized field, on the basis of a set of privileged texts, could and did lead to decisive turns in cultural and ideological orientation, and more than once to political conflict and military violence; it also had unquestionably massive historical consequences. The enormous stakes of such special textual analyses make them ideal enlarged objects in which meaning-formation can be observed. We can confidently say that an interdisciplinary study of literature and religion could contribute in essential ways to our knowledge of the human race as an interpretive and self-interpretive entity.

The fourth principle. Differentiation and generality: this raises the interesting methodological question of whether the time-honored archetypal criticism is actually identical (or overlaps in large areas) with an interdisciplinary study of religion, the former providing much of the raw material and, often, many of the tools for the latter. Archetypal studies would seem also to have the additional advantage of being relatively more value-free and objective, and therefore less controversial. Nevertheless, with all due respect for mythological studies, I do not regard the two as being identical.¹⁵ Mythical archetypes provide a general level of reference for any literary work; in its generality this level is necessary, but not sufficient. Religious intertextuality provides the kind of historical and specific referentiality that literary works need in order to preserve their autonomy and dignity.

Historical accuracy is inevitably involved here. Discussing *Pamela* in Jungian or Freudian terms is certainly an interesting exercise, but it is only and precisely that: an exercise. Samuel Richardson

was not really thinking in Freudian or in Jungian categories, but rather in those of dissident Protestantism: virtue preserved and virtue lost, free will and design, salvation and sin. It goes without saying that a fuller understanding of an early Chinese novel (say, *The Pilgrimage to the West*), or of an Indian epic, will in turn have to draw, not upon a general archetypal comparative background or solely upon it, but upon the specific religious-intellectual categories that surrounded its author and the original audience for the works.

VII

The proposal is not new that a classification of a world literature seeking to go beyond the confines of Eurocentrism could use as a measuring device “The Book”—that is, its relationship to the Bible. Abraham Avni, for instance, established a number of categories, such as cultures untouched by The Book (Maya, Aztec, Old Slavic, Scandinavian, Old Celtic, etc.), those indirectly influenced by it, and so forth. Inside Western culture, Avni established periods shaped by Biblical discourse, and periods of tension with or withdrawal from the Biblical text.¹⁶

This idea is very intriguing and deserves attention. Personally, I would be willing to accept it, but only with further qualifications. It remains stimulating particularly for those among us who are genuinely preoccupied by the need to develop categories that could globalize comparative literature.

Thus, for example, one ought to investigate the reasons why, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, literary criticism found more favorable territory for growth than elsewhere. I think that the Trinitarian understanding of divinity was one important reason (insofar as it reinforced *relational* modes in intellectual life), and that even more important was the bold recognition of a multiplicity of canonical Gospels, despite disagreements, or even contradictions, among them. Likewise the multiplicity of Jewish interpretations of the Scriptures contributed categorically to the empowering of literary criticism, as indicated above.

Be that as it may, it seems clear that literary-religious intellectuality provides us with an important avenue towards a more global

outlook. Understanding the relationships of each literature and culture to its own religious categories and sensibilities (or some of these general ones) can in turn provide us with a broad common platform (the history of religions) and the important benefit of the methodological experience provided by the comparative study of religions.

VIII

The examples adduced, both from political history and theory, and from the religious dimensions of literature seem to me very illuminating. Any objective observer will admit that religion until now was, and seems to continue to be for the foreseeable future, a powerful, sometimes decisive, presence in human affairs and the functioning of societies. Such an observation does not imply value judgments; it does, however, raise many question marks as to the behavior of all those who try to deliberately minimize and marginalize the presence of religion in public consciousness.

The reasons for raising such questions fall into two categories. The first category is: what is the utility or the good that follows from such negations, since their irrelevance or impotence is loudly proclaimed by virtually any past experience? The second set of questions is connected with the first, though, in a way, symmetrically opposite. The very same historical experience and record shows that religion can score only temporary victories. Thus “triumphalist religions” (or, more correctly, religions in their “triumphalist phases”) do not have long durations, whether we are talking about the West or the East.

Any close combination (be it outrightly “theocratic” or less so) with the secular realm is bound to dissolve, to weaken in the short term, and eventually become so tenuous as to disappear altogether. This is due to a certain incompatibility of aims between the two, to be sure. It is also due, however, to the intrinsic make-up of religions that point in the direction of hope, probability, open horizons, desire, and the more remote ranges of the future. Meanwhile, we know very well that secular agendas are directed toward short-range aims and specific issues, and that they seek complete accomplishments.

Religion therefore must always count on loss (albeit temporary loss). Religion(s) are almost always imbued with humility, with a recognition of the relative insignificance and “small-size” of customary human preoccupations; they will always deal in imperfection. In the case of Christianity in particular, the central narrative of the Gospels is based not only on humility, but also on incontestable earthly failure and the announcement of future suffering and martyrdom. Examining Christianity’s two-thousand-year-old history, it is not unfair to judge that the very emphasis on hope in Christian theology carries with it some implications of humble consolation and limitative renunciation. Likewise, the constant preoccupation with compassion in Christianity, as well as in other religions, certainly implies the existence of failure, loss, and incompleteness.

Given this state of affairs, the linkage of the cultural and/or literary with the religious must inevitably act as a kind of brake and warning sign. This linkage shows that literature itself strengthens our definition of the aesthetic imagination as one inclined toward, and dedicated to, the presentation and study of defeat.

Meanwhile, the example of Christian-Democratic experiences also carries some highly useful lessons with it. Indeed, here we have a “weak” version of the political involvement of religion. Nevertheless, even the modest intentions put forward in this version prove ephemeral and incomplete in their achievement. At the very least we must admit that they are defensive rather than offensive and that they are obliged to carry with them a repetitive imperative. The areas in which Christian-Democratic values and plans prove themselves somewhat more durable are precisely the ethical and the cultural, and why this should be so can be easily explained in terms of our discussion. The cultural/imaginative realm is the one that serves as homeland for all refugees of defeat and imperfection.

Notes

1 Henri Brémond, *Prière et poésie* (Paris: Grasset, 1926) as well as his monumental, 11-volume *Histoire du sentiment religieux en France* (1924–1933). In America I consider the founders of the religion/literature field Amos Wilder (the brother of the great novelist) and the prominent African-American scholar Nathan Scott. See Nathan Scott, *Modern Literature and the Religious Frontier* (New York: Harper, 1958). *Ibid.*, *The Broken Center: Studies in the Theological Horizon of Modern Literature* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1966). *Ibid.*, *The Poetics of Belief* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985). Amos Wilder, *Modern Poetry and the Christian Tradition. A Study in the Relation of Christianity to Culture* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952). *Ibid.*, *Theology and Modern Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958). *Ibid.*, *The New Voice. Religion, Literature, Hermeneutics* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969). Even earlier are some Eastern Orthodox theorizings, such as those of Vladimir Solovyov; for a good synthesis of this line of thought see Mihail Diaconescu, *Prelegeri de estetica Ortodoxiei*, 2 vols. (Galati: Porto-Franco, 1996).

2 Some examples, almost at random: Theodore Ziolkowski, *Fictional Transfigurations of Jesus* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972). R. J. Frontrain and Jan Wojcik, eds., *The David Myth in Western Literature* (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 1980). Karsten Harries, *The Rococo Bavarian Church: Between Faith and Aestheticism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1983). Edward Leach, *Structuralist Interpretations of Biblical Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Beryl Schlossman, *Joyce's Catholic Comedy of Language* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985). Very good is George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

3 Parts of this section have also been published in "Literary Play and Religious Referentiality," in Virgil Nemoianu and Robert Royal, eds., *Play, Literature, Religion* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992), pp. 1–18.

4 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit. Eine theologische Aesthetik*, 3 vols. (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1961–1968). *Ibid.*, *Theodramatik*, 4 vols. (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1975–1981). See also *ibid.*, *Reinhold Schneider. Sein Weg und Werk* (Köln-Olten: Hegner, 1953); *ibid.*, *Bernanos* (1954; Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1971). The best studies about Balthasar are Aldo Moda, *Hans Urs von Balthasar: Un'esposizione critica del suo pensiero* (Bari: Ecumenica, 1976). Manfred Lochbrunner, *Analoga caritatis: Darstellung und Deutung der Theologie Hans Urs von Balthasars* (Freiburg: Herder, 1981). *Hans Urs von Balthasar: Gestalt und Werk*, Walter Kasper, ed. (Köln: Communio, 1989). Elio Guerriero, *Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Milan: Pao-line, 1991). Edward T. Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Continuum, 1997). Aidan Nichols, *The Word Has Been Abroad: A Guide through Balthasar's Aesthetics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998).

5 When he was informed that he was granted the red hat of a Cardinal in 1988, he reacted with a notable lack of enthusiasm. He died almost exactly on the day when the ceremony of induction would have taken place in Rome. In my opinion, one of Balthasar's greatest accomplishments was that he achieved and represented the synthesis and the culmination of the formidable twentieth-century Catholic revival that included figures such as Henri de Lubac, Yves Congar, Jacques Maritain, Romano

Guardini, Josef Pieper, Karol Wojtyła, Joseph Ratzinger, Walter Kasper, Adrienne von Speyr, von Hildebrand, Luigi Giussani, Thomas Merton, Louis Dupré, and many others along with literary luminaries such as Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, Allen Tate, G. K. Chesterton, H. Belloc, Evelyn Waugh, Paul Claudel, Charles Péguy, Georges Bernanos, François Mauriac, Reinhold Schneider, and others far too numerous to enumerate.

6 George Steiner, *Antigones* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 232–277, gives an excellent account of the five “polarities” or “axes” that shape any literary text.

7 The “dialogical” principle became known in the circles of academic criticism quite late (1970s) through the work of M. M. Bakhtin. Even so, the Judeo-Christian sources of dialogism were admitted or discovered by Bakhtin’s exegetes much later (say, the 1990s). This is one of the amusing curiosities of history in the humanities.

8 See also Jean-Luc Marion, *Dieu sans l’être* (Paris: Fayard, 1984), as well as *Réduction et donation: Recherches sur Husserl, Heidegger et la phénoménologie* (Paris: PUF, 1989), *Prolégomènes à la charité* (Paris: Editions de la Difference, 1986), or *Étant donné: essai d’une phénoménologie de la donation* (Paris: PUF, 1997).

9 In *De Deo Abscondito*, quoted after the German translation Nikolas von Kues, *Drei Schriften vom verborgenen Gott* (Hamburg: F. Meiner, 1958), ed. and transl. E. Bohnenstadt, pp. 4–5. Meister Eckhardt was the chief proponent of this kind of theorizing (in a poetical mysticism) during the Western Middle Ages. It would be appropriate to quote here the medieval aphorism: “Si comprehendis non est Deus.”

10 I do not have the ambition to offer here an exhaustive bibliography. Jewish, Protestant, and Orthodox scholars played and play a decisive role: Paul Ricoeur and Emanuel Lévinas, C. S. Lewis and Paul Tillich, Vladimir Solovyov and his disciple Lossky are pathbreaking figures. I will confine myself here to a number of more specialized works. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951) is justly famous, as is David Jones, *Epoch and Artist* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), comprising essays written during 20 years. See also Helen Gardner, *Religion and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971). Vernon Ruland, *Horizons of Criticism: An Assessment of Religious-Literary Options* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1975). William Mallard, *The Reflection of Theology in Literature* (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 1977). Robert O’Connell, *Art and Christian Intelligence in St. Augustine* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978). Michael Edwards, *Towards a Christian Poetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984). Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action. Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984). Leland Ryken, *Culture in Christian Perspective: A Door to Understanding and Enjoying the Arts* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1986). *Ibid.*, *Triumphs of the Imagination. Literature in Christian Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1979). John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Philipsburg NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1987). Frank Burch Brown, *Religious Aesthetics: A Theological Study of Making and Meaning* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989). James Alfred Martin, *Beauty and Holiness: The Dialogue Between Aesthetics and Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990). *Contemporary Literary Theory: A Christian Appraisal*, eds. Clarence Walhout and Leland Ryken (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991). John Saward, *The Beauty of Holiness and the Holiness of Beauty* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1997). Thomas Dubay, *The Evidential Power of Beauty* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1999).

David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003). Daniel Ritchie, *Reconstructing Literature in an Ideological Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996).

11 The writings of the above-mentioned Amos Wilder and Nathan Scott might provide examples here. As to “discourses” see Luce Irigaray, *Speculum de l’autre femme* (Paris: Minuit, 1974) or Julia Kristeva, “Heretique de l’amour” in *Tel Quel* 74 (Winter 1977): 30–49, later republished and translated in slightly modified form as “Stabat Mater.” Both argue at least occasionally in favor of mysticism as the preferential discourse of femininity. Also Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in 17th Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) and numerous others of the same kind. On a more amusing note one observes that the erstwhile decisive leftist Jacques Derrida has now (somewhat blunderingly) entered religious terrains: see *Circonfession* (1991) where St Augustine is central, and his *Gift of Death* (1996). John Caputo in *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* (1997) analyzed (without irony!) these changes of face.

12 See also note 1 on Brémond.

13 John B. Gabel, Charles B. Wheeler and Anthony D. York, *The Bible as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, eds. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987). Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981). Ibid., *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985). Edward Leach and D. Alan Aycok, *Structuralist Interpretations of Biblical Myth* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979). Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984). Ibid., *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987). Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (San Diego and New York: HBJ/Harvest, 1981). Stephen Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospel: The Theoretical Challenge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). In fact in the last 20 years or so more and more public, secular, American universities have begun to include among their offerings courses on “The Bible as Literature.”

14 There is a millennia-old tradition of Kabbalah and Midrash as interpretations of the Hebrew Bible. See Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) or *Midrash and Literature*, eds. Geoffrey Hartman and Sanford Budick (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), among others. Equally millennia-old is the Christian tradition of reading Biblical texts on at least four levels of understanding, and we might also mention here to some extent the tradition and exercise of casuistics that flourished soon after the Counter-Reformation.

15 This provides a distinguished roster: the names of James Frazer, author of the justly famous multi-volume *The Golden Bough* (1896–1936) and, mostly between the two world wars, of the “Cambridge ritualists” (Jane Harrison, Gilbert Murray, perhaps Jessie Weston and Maud Bodkin) come immediately to mind. Their purpose to “undermine” Christianity was ironically turned upside down when their works became, in the readers’ minds, arguments in favor of a generalized religiosity of which Christianity was the crowning faith. More neutral, or sometimes even in favor of Christian tenets, were luminaries such as Victor Turner; Joseph Campbell, *Primitive Mythology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, 4 vols.

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972–1982), Karl Kerényi, *Archetypal Images in Greece* (New York: Pantheon, 1959) or *Zeus and Hera* (Leiden: Brill, 1972) to name just a few of the leading specialists in myth theory and archetype research. In their wake figures (not less distinguished) like Northrop Frye and Rene Girard, like Gaston Bachelard, Mark Schorer or Leslie Fiedler applied the method more specifically to literature. One book that is unjustly and sorely ignored is Benjamin Constant's massive *De la religion* (1824–1831), fortunately republished in 1999 by T. Todorov and E. Hofmann (Arles: Actes Sud, 1999). The truth is that during the early nineteenth century we witness the publication of numerous valuable works along the same line of research: this would require a separate study.

16 Abraham Avni, "The Bible as Periodizing Factor in Comparative Literature," in Milan Dimič, Eva Kushner, Roman Struc, eds., *Proceedings of the 7th Congress of the I.C.L.A.*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: E. Biebr, 1979), 2: 73–75.

CHAPTER 3

THE DIALECTIC OF LITERATURE AND HISTORY

I

The next step in this discussion ought to be the interaction between the writing of literature and the writing of history, and, almost inevitably, the contrastive role played by utopia. In a way, of course, utopia combines both of these, while also connecting them with the matter discussed in the previous chapter, namely religion, with or without religion's occasional involvement with politics.

The main part of my presentation will deal with examples taken from the early nineteenth century, the period when two important events occurred: one was the invention and the spread of the historical novel, the other was the emergence of a kind of historiography that very openly argued that using just some of the mind's faculties (such as reason and memory) is not enough—one needs the full range of these faculties, including imagination, sentiment, empathy, as auxiliary elements. Both these events were due, to continue the arguments made in previous chapters, to the avalanche of an ever-expanding amount of information and the desperate attempts of the individual intelligence to come to terms with it without claiming absolute results or answers. Likewise, we notice the intermeshing of two types of discourse that had long been considered as opposed. In fact, I am persuaded that these two came to support each other by the very fact that they were, in one way or another, handling the same matter of human imperfection and accepting the role of what we called in our first chapter “the secondary.”

At the same time I will try to explain how this interaction, which undoubtedly led to a kind of management of the past quite different from the one we encounter today (and, in fact, from many of the approaches that preceded it), is nevertheless a valid, seriously debatable manner of confronting the past, present, and future. In this

way we can more easily recognize the manner in which this kind of combined history/literature writing must be distinguished sharply and radically from any form of utopian and agenda-driven or reductionist vision.

It is easy to admit that utopian writing is itself an alternative area of intersectional discourses. Indeed, from whichever angle we look at utopia we observe a triangular shape: politics, religion, and literature collaborate and jostle each other at every point. Thus we are undoubtedly faced with a situation that is formally rather similar to that of the relationship between historiography and the historical novel, and yet radically different in content and subject matter.

II

Utopian writing has, at least in the West, two main sources: one derives from the visions of Classical Antiquity and the other from the implications of the Judeo-Christian Biblical narrative. At the same time (and here utopianism begins to differ seriously from the history/literature cooperation), there is in virtually any utopian discourse, in fact even in most dystopian discourses, an element of absolute proclamation, a kind of what I would call *closed infinity*—exactly the kind of thing that is avoided in historical novels, which present themselves as cautionary narratives of moderation, relativity, and mere probability at most.

What do I mean by this? Let me offer some explanatory illustrations. First in connection with origins. The Biblical narrative, equally in the Christian and the Hebrew tradition, begins with the state of Edenic perfection, happiness and even power. It is only the break in this state that leads to the beginning of history, with all its tribulations, dangers, sufferings, and modifications. The ethical infringement, the Fall, leads to the emergence and production of history. However, history is relative and inevitably temporary, being connected with time. It will come to an end with the arrival, or else the return of, the Messiah, or of the Divine Savior. What will follow is general reconciliation and redemption, either in the transcendent mode or in the shape of a secular utopia. This set of concepts is deeply rooted in the monotheist religions, but, interestingly, we

also find different kinds of analogies in many other religions, from Babylonian to East Asian.

The best known in the West—and this is the second of the two originating motors—is found in Greek-Roman Antiquity and its diverse and abundant myths. They have reached us as visions of the Golden Age preceding other stages of history, as in the surviving verse of Hesiod, or else as the myth of Atlantis and other privileged places (from Plato to Alexandrian literature, perhaps even with Egyptian sources, as has been suggested more recently). They reached us as the image of the Elysian Fields for good, brave, and noble humans, or as the Olympian perfection of the serene divinities. Small wonder that such imagery blended easily in receptive minds with the Biblical traditions, or the other way round. The essential thing is that, in both sets of cases, we are faced with environments that are opposed to the vagaries of the merely historical and to its unavoidable imperfections.

Now, what were the consequences? I will confine myself to just three categories of examples in order to indicate the triangular interactions I was talking about just before. The first of these three is characterized predominantly by the combination of the religious and the political. Thus, for instance, millenarian movements are probably 2500 years old, at least. However they multiplied beginning with the first century A.D., when Christian believers were clearly divided between those who expected a prompt return of the Messiah and those who counseled patience. Even well after adjudication went in favor of the latter group, Gnostic fringe groups developed an enormous range of alternative options, and the Middle Ages are replete with movements (sometimes violent) that wanted to manipulate or hasten the advent of the Final Days, and of a perfected and regenerated society and human race.

As a matter of fact, one may argue that the whole of the Middle Ages cannot be understood without these insistently recurring utopian visions. The Crusades are to a good extent utopian. The emergence of the Franciscan and Dominican orders may be read as utopian movements adroitly captured and channeled or streamlined by the institutional ecclesiastical authorities. Not so the Cathar movement, equally utopian, but unbending and doomed to destruction. A number of peasant revolts from that of John Ball in England

in 1381 to that of Thomas Münzer in Germany in 1585 acted under openly pro-utopian slogans. The dialectics of socioeconomic class struggle and utopian vision is in all these cases a most fascinating historical subject. Ultimately a good part of the Protestant Reformation arose from utopian yearnings.

In contrast with these activist and popular movements, our second group of examples is writerly and much more patrician than plebeian. It may be said to begin with the writings of Joachim de Fiore (1145–1202), the Southern Italian abbot and hermit, who developed the theory of tripartite history that would end with the rise of the third empire, the realm of the Holy Spirit. Soon the powerful religious element was replaced by a combination of the literary and the political—for instance in the writings of St Thomas More (who, in fact, coined the very term in 1516), the *New Atlantis* of Sir Francis Bacon, in the *City of the Sun* of Campanella, in the architectural plan of Leon Battista Alberti and of Filareto's *Sforzinda* (c. 1461–1464), in the feminist projects put forward by Christine de Pisan in early-fifteenth-century France, or Margaret Cavendish, the Duchess of Newcastle, in mid-seventeenth-century England. In most of these works and many others of the same kind, using the term “literature” is nevertheless somewhat erroneous, when the intentions were those of light philosophy and hidden political agendas, masked by a transparent literary discourse.

Let me add that my emphasis on the Medieval and Renaissance family of writers is not meant to suggest that utopian writings did not continue, for instance in the nineteenth century with Samuel Butler or Edward Bellamy, or the twentieth century with Hermann Hesse, to name just a few among many others, equally distinguished and influential. The third group that we can adduce is linked with the *dystopian* discourse of the twentieth century, preceded though it was by pioneers such as Jonathan Swift in his early-eighteenth-century *Gulliver's Travels*. This includes writers like Alfred Kubin, Franz Kafka, Čapek, Burgess, Evgeny Zamyatin, Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, occasionally Vladimir Solovyov, Vladimir Nabokov, or Ernst Jünger. I am not even mentioning the vast area of science fiction, where both utopia and dystopia unfold themselves to the fullest.

What all these rather different writers have in common is that they reacted against twentieth-century attempts to actually implement in the here and now utopian possibilities and present in all their horror the ugliness and suffering of the consequences and outcomes of totalitarian experiments. But two words of caution: the first is that by “totalitarian” I do not mean exclusively the political regimes (large and small) that were so frequent at the time. I also mean totalitarian impulses that perpetually raise their head inside parliamentary, constitutional, or democratic systems, in one or the other of their branches or sections. The other word of caution is that in these works literature does indeed play a more conspicuous role. In my opinion that is precisely the reason why these works are dystopian rather than utopian.

I will now turn to the contacts and interfaces of historical narrative with fictional writing, particularly in the early nineteenth century.

III

Indeed, to the extent to which we can speak about the “relativism” of the above-mentioned age, it was moderated and disguised in the garb of succession and evolution. A wave of interest in continuity, or, even more precisely, in the dialectic between continuity and change, swept Europe and colored all fields of human endeavor and knowledge. Radical modification (of human societies and minds) or outright “reinvention” found themselves buffered by thick layers of continuity. Here also, literature had intervened decisively. Literature borrowed from history to the extent that it gave birth to the historical novel as a “psychomachia,” while the counterpart was the crystallization of a historiography bolstered decisively by literary techniques and effects. Both were techniques of moderation.

The year 1815, when Sir Walter Scott’s *Waverley* was published anonymously but to unexpected acclaim and popular success (both in England and abroad), is conventionally taken as the year when a new genre (or sub-genre) was born: the historical novel. *Waverley* did not emerge in empty territory: it was preceded by eighteenth-century “Gothic” and/or horror novels, by diverse “Rittergeschicht-

en,” even earlier by dramatic productions which clothed moral and psychological issues in historical vestments (not least the neo-classical writings of Corneille, Racine and their descendants throughout Europe; but then again this was a writing strategy to which the Spanish “siglo de oro” had already resorted).¹

Why was the historical novel as revamped and reconstructed by Walter Scott perceived as something genuinely innovative and *why* was it so eagerly imitated throughout Europe and North America, and soon even outside the confines of the Western world?

Part of the answer lies in the lifeline that Scott had established to poetry. It has been said more than once that Scott switched over to the novel as a vehicle, when and because he felt that the plot(s) of his narrative(s) could no longer be contained inside the verse stories that he had practiced with some enthusiasm. I believe this is true, and, more broadly, this is the point of prominent commentators such as György Lukács when they regarded the historical novel as the middle-class substitute for the epic in its death throes.²

I believe, however, that a more contextual examination can provide us with richer explanations, and I will refer briefly to *three* of these contexts. *One* is the age-old dispute between poetry and history, a matter that preoccupied such luminaries as Aristotle or Sir Philip Sidney. The *second* is the explosive emergence of history as a central discipline in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and the need and desire of many other intellectual discourses to emulate it. It is here that the process became dialectical, history itself learning and borrowing from literature. The *third* is what some describe as ideological, though I for one prefer to call it morpho-cultural: conveying a message of solution, of peaceful reconciliation, of “taming” the radicalities of Romanticism and revolution and replacing them with the cultivation of imperfection. This, in other words, produced real historical “détente” through the writerly discourse of historical détente. Let me dwell briefly on each of these contexts and provide some examples.

Sir Philip Sidney at the end of the sixteenth century defends poetry mostly against the arguments that imaginative literature must inevitably be inferior to “realistic” or “factual” narrative in as far as the latter deals with truth and reality, whereas the other is merely a creature of invention. Sidney argues (to some extent) ironically that

“poetry” (imaginative creativity in the broadest sense of the word, of course) reaches truth in different ways, namely by focusing on the central ideas, the Platonic archetypes, and depicting them in ways in which history could never do it. The historian “laden with old mouse-eaten records, authorizing himself (for the most part) upon other histories, whose greatest authorities are built upon the notable foundation of hearsay,” is more likely to be a liar. By contrast, poetry, the most ancient form of human learning, does not contain evil, mixes delight and goodness. It is the least likely to contain lies since it does not *affirm* anything; it is profitable to memory, rich in morality, able to stir courage, to strengthen man, and is rightly praised by such luminaries as St Paul and Plato.³

Although Sidney can be fairly described as a neo-Platonist, there is also an obvious continuity with Aristotelian thinking here. We remember that in the *Poetics*, Aristotle had also argued that poetry is something more philosophic and of more serious importance than history, for poetry tends to deal with the general, while history is concerned with limited, particular facts. An instance of the general (with which poetry undertakes to deal) is this: “what are the sorts of things which, according to the law of probability and necessity, various types of individuals tend to do and say? This is what poetry aims to make when it attaches names to characters. An instance of particular facts is: what did Alcibiades do, or what was done to him?” also “If the objection is raised: ‘this is not true,’ the answer is: perhaps the poet is portraying it *as it should be*.”

The main point we want to keep in mind is that both these powerful Classicist thinkers were keenly aware of a certain dialectic between history and fiction. They realized similarities and tried to draw distinctions at the same time. *Narrative* and *memory* provided a common ground, yet at a certain point there was a branching out depending on the *mode* in which they were used and on the goals that were pursued. This is, in my opinion, the general background of aesthetic philosophy against which eventually the historical novel appeared. This is also their common commitment to imperfection.

My second point is the fact that the socio-cultural context emerging at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries was dominated by the “discovery” of *history* as a leading force in intellectual life. There was an increasing sense of accelera-

tion in society at all levels, a kind of “revolutionary” need to more and more radically reform not only the present and the future, but also the past. The latter would be reformed in both senses: to make it compatible with the present and the future, but also to employ it as a kind of symmetrical counter-balance to them. The social and the natural sciences inscribed themselves immediately, vigorously, and enthusiastically in this comprehensive historicizing tendency. Thus paleontology sought a variety of explanations as to how the animal world had reached its current stage, and though the answers of Cuvier, Geoffroy de Saint-Hilaire, or Erasmus Darwin may have differed (until Charles Darwin’s unifying, but equally “historical,” theory seemed to provide common explanatory ground), they and others had one thing in common: they agreed to a kind of historical methodology for research. The questions asked were directed toward the process of development in nature.

In linguistics (to take a totally different example), although earlier (eighteenth century) questioning concentrated on the *philosophy* of language, changes were soon apparent throughout the nineteenth century. In fact, until Saussure, Potebnya, and Baudoin de Courtenay, the respectable academic pursuit was that of the way in which language changed: how modern Romance and Germanic vernaculars grew out of Latin and “common Germanic,” how both the latter, together with Slavic, Celtic, Sanskrit and others, grew out of Indo-European ancestors. Admissible and recommended research also included another historical process, dialectology, that is to say the branching out and diversification of one common trunk into its regional or local variants.

It has been argued that sociology also came out of historical curiosity: finding out the causal regularities that led to the construction of present-day inter-human worlds. (This was argued more recently by Spaemann, for instance, with respect to Bonald, but François Guizot and his adversary Jaime Balmes had already said similar things in the 1820s and 1830s.) No less active was the history of law when it tried to establish continuities and pedigrees connecting Roman law or primitive Germanic law with current legislation. As to the study of literature, it was, in academic institutions until well after World War I, primarily an examination of sources, of manuscripts, of the “ancientness,” and thus credibility

and validity, of texts. In fact, the history of literature tended to stop short of contemporary tongues and to deal admiringly with “dead literatures” of different kinds.

Above all it is of course impossible to overlook the dramatic jump in the development of historical research *itself*. Naturally this also included the passionate collecting of facts and details, of “monuments,” the emergence of systematic museums, as well as the analysis of shorter, more focused periods.

Clearly, some of this work had a political and ideological purpose. It was, for instance, a competition *agon* between nations as to cultural achievements, moral perfection, antiquity of glory, and triumphs of all kinds. Or, alternatively for nations that were struggling to establish their identity and to validate themselves, it could be an accumulation of legitimizing evidence of their admissibility into the company of the higher and most civilized nations. (This applies primarily to non-independent nations such as the East-European ones: Hungary, “Czechoslovakia”, Romania, Poland, and others, but also to major and culturally somewhat insecure ones such as Russia or Italy.)

However, another and more general motivation ought to be considered. There existed a widespread anxiety of continuity and of origin. As long as the religious and specifically Biblical framework was still very solid, the scrambling for historical validation could remain marginal, an “antiquarian,” dilettantish, innocuous pursuit. The moment this religious framework became uncertain or shaky, however, the fear of chaos, the anxiety of “free-floating,” suddenly lent an enormous seriousness to the historical work, with all its imperfections. In Freudian terms this is a search for the lost father, a theme that is quite frequent in literature throughout the nineteenth century.

It seems very likely that the emergence of the historical novel is largely due to *civic*, not to merely aesthetic, pursuits. The writers of historical novels and plays were subconsciously convinced they could contribute in their own way and with their own methods to a common effort towards a worthy goal. The historical novel is thus, on the one hand, a solution to the age-old tension between fiction and history, but also, on the other, a manner of reaching a wider audience than the one of the scientific historian. It is meant to pop-

ularize and explain in a more gentle and imperfect way continuities, breaks, or simple causalities that had led to the present-day situation, however losing or defeated in its nature.

This brings us to the *third* contextual element. The historical novel was born as an actual and active mode of writing precisely at the time when Western society was grappling with the issue of moderating or taming its own “revolutionary” tendencies and handling them in an acceptable way. (Obviously, “revolutionary” is not used here in its much narrower political sense, but rather in the broadest possible one: it refers to mentalities, to ways of life, to values, orientations, informational mass, standards and so forth.) A great variety of vehicles and approaches were devised in order to serve the goal of such a reconciliation between the past and the rapidly arriving future and in order to appease the looming conflicts. All of them hosted imperfection and defeat.

Inside this luxuriant vegetation of ingenious literary techniques, the historical novel occupied a place of honor. As conceived by Sir Walter Scott in his *Waverley* cycle, it was meant to dramatize the conflict between two great modes of life (socioeconomic systems, *Weltanschauungen*, systems of customs and existence, philosophies of behavior), but *above all* to reach a reasonable synthesis between the two, to re-establish continuities, to reveal stabilities, to transfer values, to reconcile people with manifold imperfections. In the novels of Walter Scott and his followers, we always encounter the argument that a certain reconciliation is possible between the past and the onrushing future.

IV

Naturally, such broad intentions can only be described as conservative. It would be futile to repeat here what was so often and so well explained: that Scott himself was a staunch conservative, a defender of the Scottish identity, an adversary of the French Revolution, clearly a Burkean, an individual desirous of being included in the landed “squirearchy” of his time. (It is obvious that the Lukácsian theory of “translation” of the ancient epic into the bourgeois prose of the historical novel will not be very helpful here, or take us very

far.) In my opinion, Scott revealed again, and brilliantly, how a *psychomachia*, fictional though it may be, can have an eloquent influence on the audience. His theory of history moves in the direction of human or social progress, it takes into account losses over the years and centuries, and it adroitly emphasizes the issue of “transfer of values.” Scott proposes solutions to issues that were at the time (and largely continue to be) of great moment for everybody. His “middlingness” is obvious.

We can thus explain the overwhelming success of the *Waverley* cycle, as well as of other novels written by him, and we can account most convincingly for the armies of imitators in most countries. Perhaps the most successful and percipient among these was James Fenimore Cooper, who transferred to America the struggle between a modernizing English society and a traditional, localist and diversitarian Scotland, this time at the even graver level of racial interaction (Amerindian against Euroamerican). One might argue whether the *Leatherstocking* pentalogy is not perhaps the first great “multiculturalist” work.

Some early works by Balzac (*Les Chouans* for instance), Hugo’s *Notre Dame de Paris*, Vigny’s only novel (*Cinq-Mars*), and some writings by Gil y Carrasco in Spain also follow Scott. Hugo’s chief historical novel is particularly subtle and significant. He sets up in *Notre Dame de Paris* the opposition between “cathedral” and “book”: the former is supposed to represent the concreteness and the organicity of human handicraft, the latter the “mechanical reproduction of the work of art,” the quantification, the numerization of existence. The French Romantic, at least in his youngest creative years, presses this opposition into a kind of confrontational melodrama, with Quasimodo and other characters connected to the Cathedral as deformed (a signal of defeat), even monstrous, images.

Even as late as 1872, however, Hugo, in his novel *Quatrevingt-treize*, creates a character (Gauvain) who is equally the spiritual son of a liberal aristocrat and a radical and pitiless revolutionary, much in the tradition of numerous Scottian figures. Balzac frankly and unabashedly imitates Scott, while Vigny projects (as Alexandre Dumas-Père was to do a little later) the ordering and leveling power of central absolutism. Manzoni is undoubtedly more original, and his thematics are somewhat different (he also in his later years

tried to distance himself, unsuccessfully in my opinion, from the historical novel), but it would be difficult to understand, even imagine, him outside the horizon outlined by Scott. The same is true of Pushkin's *Captain's Daughter*, as well as of a considerable number of East European works, not least Mickiewicz's admirable *Pan Tadeusz*.

In Germany, where the historical novel was highly important throughout the nineteenth century, one critic particularly highlighted four works (of which at least three closely followed Scott or were contemporary with him: Achim von Arnim's unfinished *Die Kronenwächter* (with its conspiratorial-fantastic shades) (1817), *Lichtenstein* by Wilhelm Hauff (1826), set in the early sixteenth century and based on tensions between local, rural, and monarchic forces, and *Die Hosen des Herrn von Bredow* (1846) as well as other novels by Willibald Alexis (in 1823 Alexis had already reviewed Scott). Some works by Adalbert Stifter follow shortly, but arguably the hybrid and ambiguous *Die Epigonen* by Karl Immermann could be included, though it misses the neater conclusions of the purely Scottian tradition.

When it comes to the borders between history and fiction, we can begin by engaging Scott's novels, not in their strict text but as whole "packages," that is to say by including in our text reading the prefaces, along with the detailed final notes that are added to the *Waverley* novels in particular. Thus, for example in *Waverley* itself, we find explanations and justifications regarding the personality and the conditions of the death of Colonel Gardiner (notes 3 and 19), geographical circumstances in the same novel (notes 7, 16, 17 and others), customs alluded to in the text (notes 5, 10, 11 and others), or else highly visible historically attested figures like Prince Charles-Edward (long note 22).

In *Redgauntlet*, Scott not only resorts to a post-script by "Mr. Dryasdust," but also to justifying notes on the characters and the circumstances of the novel. Likewise, in *Rob Roy*, we find several documentary letters written by the chief and title character in the end. This goes on in novel after novel. Curiously enough, literary scholars have not thought Scott's ample works of history and "antiquarianism" (monographs on Dryden, Swift, Napoleon, demonology and witchcraft, early ethnology among other things) worth exam-

ining more seriously or extensively, and we likewise miss in-depth discussions of his prefaces to the novels. For our purposes, however, suffice it to say that Scott clearly had the ambition to evoke history by literary means, by suddenly expanding the angle of vision, presenting scenes, exploring the psychological motivations, imagining the emotions of historical characters, and depicting backgrounds (habitual human beings and natural or urban scenery). The “notes” were supposed to bolster the narrative and offer convincing material as to the mimetic truth of the texts.⁴

At the same time Scott and many of his followers were convinced of the importance of *details* in ways in which earlier historians (Bossuet or Voltaire) were not. It has often been observed that Scott established as a generic rule that the main and well-documented historical characters ought to function as secondary fictional characters in the background (or be obliquely referred to), while secondary or outright invented historical figures are the ones who function as foregrounded fictional characters (cf. Maignon, 276–291). Novelists such as Scott thought of themselves as useful, perhaps indispensable, auxiliaries of historians; they were often welcomed as such by historians contemporary with them, not least because of their freedom in dealing with these “secondary” or invented characters. (A full theory of this mode of history writing came much later, by the end of the nineteenth century, with Dilthey and the concept of *Einfühlung*). This double role of historian/novelist can also be recognized in the actual language used inside the texts. Formal, elegant, theoretical passages alternate easily with the dialectal idioms of specific locality in ways that had been rarely used in the past.

V

Many legitimate historical authors, in particular among the French, were trying to do rather similar things: to provide a colorful, attractive pictorial system of historical situations. It is quite true that the early nineteenth century also hosted the beginnings of a “positivist” strain of history writing, from Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886) to the later Theodor Mommsen (1817–1903), albeit in these cases one can also find moral and philosophical implications and agendas,

structures proximate to the lesson and the sermon. German, French, and English historians, not least Savigny or Mignet or Froude, can be included here (Gooch, 24–49 and elsewhere).

Nevertheless, the dominant Romantic school from one end of Europe to the other originated in France. The most typical contrastive case is provided by Augustin Thierry (1795–1856) in his *Récits des temps mérovingiens* (1840) and, to a great extent, his *Histoire de la conquête de l'Angleterre par les Normands*, 3 vols. (1825). Thierry divides historicity in two parts: critique and evocation. A little less than half of his Merovingian book contains a kind of general theoretical judgment of prior authors, as well as an attempt to define the specificity of his research field (what French history is, or how it ought to be defined). The actual bulk of the text is composed of narratives—based on sources, to be sure, but freely extended and expanded on the basis of psychological probability, imaginative complements, and the free formulation of “likely” speech. “Balzacian” characters appear and cross each other (actually Thierry freely admitted that he felt influenced by Scott) from one story to the other.

The distinction between the “two races”—the barbarous, treacherous and violent Frankish, and the refined, thoughtful, and thorough Roman-Gallic, much underlined by later commentators—seems to me less interesting than Thierry’s historical methodology and horizon. For him, historicity seems to be the fact that there is no complete formal closure; instead, we have characters, destiny, colorful adventures, but not exactly a termination and final points. The best proof of Thierry’s breakthrough was that he influenced the right as well as the left (not least of all Marx). In any case, his lessons found analogies in, or else were solidly assimilated by, other early nineteenth-century historians, in France and abroad (see also Gooch 163–165). Thierry was friends with Chateaubriand, who, after all, might also be considered as within the category of French Romantic historians.

The multi-volume *Histoire des Ducs de Bourgogne* (1824–1828) by Prosper de Barante mixes the “naivety” and directness of the Medieval chronicles with a most conscious art and practiced pictorial skill. (Again a case in which Scott’s novel-writing, here specifically *Quentin Durward*, was influential, at least as a trigger.) Jules Michelet, the disciple of Vico and Herder, went well beyond Thier-

ry in his literary-visionary discourse, ultimately including geology and cosmology in his depiction of history. (I refer here primarily to some of his works of the 1850s and 1860s, such as *L'Oiseau, la Mer, La Montagne* and others.) "Michelet provides tableaux rather than a record of events. He hurries across large tracts of territory, and lingers over individuals and occurrences that strike his imagination." (Gooch, 171) His account of the French Revolution is undoubtedly ideological, but even more subjectively imaginative.

We might say that Michelet's colleague and "disciple" Edgar Quinet follows him insofar as he dabbles in vast syntheses of spirituality and visionary democracy, and openly turns historiography into the *ancilla* of this kind of ideological program. Both historians can be placed in useful parallel with the "cosmological" poems of Victor Hugo. Villemain (1790–1859) is the very epitome of "belletristic historiography." Even as sober-minded a figure as François Guizot (1787–1874) followed the trend of the times in the kind of discourse he used when writing his *Histoire de la révolution d'Angleterre* (1841). As to Lamartine, he regarded his own historical writings as frankly literary in nature and indeed his *Histoire des Girondins* (1847, 2 vols.) is written with the verve and color of a breathtaking historical novel (Orr 1990, p. 146; in fact, Sainte-Beuve felt the need to criticize his literary excesses in 1851; see vol. IV, pp. 296–307).

The eight volumes of Karamzin's history of Russia (1803–1818), perhaps the pioneering work of Russian historiography, is rich in memorable literary portraits of major figures such as Ivan the Terrible or Boris Godunov, portraits that, in turn, remained models and fixtures for later literature and for the collective imaginary of Europe in general. In Germany at the same time, Friedrich von Raumer's multi-volume *Geschichte der Hohenstaufen und ihrer Zeit* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1823 ff.) served as a treasure-trove for future literary adaptations, and in fact was soon dramatized by Raupach into a cycle of sixteen performances that enjoyed enormous success in Berlin, as demonstrated by their being completely sold out. Even Barthold G. Niebuhr (1776–1831), perhaps the first solid "source historian," was nourished as a child by knowledge of Homeric and Mid-Eastern narrative literature, and was convinced that the earliest historical chronicles drew from songs, funeral pan-

egyrics, and the like (Gooch, 15, 19). Jakob Grimm (1785–1863) is a typical case of the deep involvement of historical and language sciences with the Romantic literary imagination (Gooch 59–53 among many, many others).

The five-volume *Geschichte von Böhmen* (1836–1867) by the Czech František Palačský (1798–1876) and *Istoria românilor sub Mihai Vodă Viteazu* (printed only in 1878, but written before 1848) by the Romanian Nicolae Bălcescu (1819–1852) are just two further examples of “belletristic history.” The first demonstrated that the Czech nation is Janus-faced insofar as it was constructed out of the dialectic between a Slavic foundation and a Germanic/Romanic context. It also emphasized the importance of the Jan Hus historical episode for the awakening of Czech national consciousness (Gooch, 398–399; Palačský, vols. I, III). The second chooses to turn a short episode of early Romanian history (approx. 1593–1601) into a model for what a revived nation could and ought to be: brave and unified, a respectable player on the European chessboard.

Nor can it be said that British history writing falls outside this domain. Above all, the figure of Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) stands out here. His justly famous *French Revolution* (1837) has often been said to be a model of the perfect combination of journalistic reporting, history, and literature. It clearly contains a certain amount of ideological intentionality, not excluding nationalism (the English gradualist way is seen as preferable to the wild oscillation between extremes of French history, from absolutism to outright terror). Nevertheless, the literary principle of combining a kind of direct “eye-witness” account with the psycho-moral portraying of individuals and scenes, and with an abundance of details (often culled from documents, but sometimes invented or “intuited”) is what truly stands out and justifies the contemporary success and the continuing influence of this work.

On the other hand, the cavalier way in which philosophers, poets, and *litterati* of all kinds managed to write history is amazing: Goldsmith and Hume (in the eighteenth century), Scott and Southey (in the nineteenth) are just some names that come to mind, their number being swelled by those of figures like Schiller in Germany or Chateaubriand and Lamartine in France, among many others. Naturally, these were not “professional historians.” However, they encour-

aged and justified “true historians” like Thomas B. Macaulay (1800–1859) in their specific writing.

Not only is Macaulay’s masterpiece, *The History of England* (3 vols., 1848–1861), a kind of novel and hymn of praise addressed to the Whig development of England, but his actual historical research alternates with pieces that are more purely literary, such as portraits of historical figures of various ages (Gooch, 281–2, among many others). Echoes of their influence can be recognized in the writings of such later figures as Henry Buckle (1821–1862), James Froude (1818–1894), W. E. H. Lecky (1838–1903), all the way to Lord Acton, or even to G. K. Chesterton and H. Belloc, who all injected the imaginative into their historical writings. In addition, historical literature and art were openly encouraged by monarchs such as Ludwig I (Gottfried) or Friedrich IV (Barclay, 30, 66) and many others.

VI

In the space opened up between fictional prose and poetry and “scientific” historiography of all kinds, one can locate a remarkable variety of writings. I will briefly discuss *three* of these: the historical portrait, the above-mentioned “tableau vivant,” and the writing of memoirs. Historical portraits were extremely popular and, one may assume, in great demand. Walter Savage Landor’s (1775–1864) *Imaginary Portraits* (of which we have no fewer than 152 printed between 1824 and 1853) are perhaps the most typical and most intellectually sophisticated.

What Landor was trying to do was to explore the motivations and the psychological and cultural mechanisms and contexts of major and admirable historical figures who may or may not have met, but who nonetheless engage in almost Plato-like dialogues of intellectual self-justification. These are clearly works of fiction, but their purposes are also clearly those of research: reaching out toward cognitive zones that are inaccessible to the mere historian, who remains tied to strict rules of documentation and reference. The fact that they are meant to be “just literary” can be seen in the elegant and careless way in which the method was taken over by poets, above all Robert Browning, who composed literary mono-

logues in verse, a kind of “stream of consciousness” of historical figures of varying importance. Many of the essays of Sainte-Beuve and Macaulay (while much more craftsman-like) could also be considered “imaginary portraits.”

By the end of the nineteenth century, the “tableaux vivants” became a kind of parlor game: the reproduction of famous paintings, for instance, or the representation of great historical scenes; these were almost a kind of predecessor of cinema. At the time we are talking about (i.e., the early nineteenth century), however, they were of interest primarily to painters and authors.

Historical painting may be said to have dominated the nineteenth century from Benjamin Haydon and Eugène Delacroix all the way to the Impressionist revolution. My chief point here would be the matter of *size*: it is quite clear that the abundance of figures and the dimensions of the paintings were such that they implied a historical ambition, a substitute for the missing documentary. Similar efforts may be recognized on a literary level, although they are nowadays more often forgotten than the painterly ones. Prosper Mérimée scored a genuine public success with his 1828 *La Jacquerie. Scènes féodales* (1828) in 36 scenes, and prepared something similar for the history of Russia. George Sand composed *Une conspiration en 1537*, which is known to have influenced Musset’s *Lorenzaccio*. Ludovic Vitet was particularly diligent with his *Les Barricades*, *La Mort de Henri III*, *Les états de Blois*, and numerous other parts of his masterpiece, *La Ligue*, that might be described anachronistically as the “docu-dramas” of the age: relatively short explanatory introductions followed by long dramatizations with dozens of characters. Lamartine’s above-mentioned *Histoire des Girondins* could also be included here.

VII

Finally, while the Romantic and the Biedermeier Ages were not the inventors of the memorializing genre, they used it systematically as a vehicle for historical writing that was also subjective. These writings are as often as not included in surveys of literature, simply because they were *read* as literature by contemporaries and posteri-

ty. Celebrated examples are Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe* and François Guizot's eight-volume *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de mon temps* 1858–1867; the very title indicates the prudence and the moderation of a Biedermeier statesman. I want to devote just a bit more space to this later and essential, but all-too-forgotten, work.

The reader of the works of this period will immediately notice that traditional conservatism, to the extent to which they may have still existed, disappeared speedily, even in the last decades after 1789. In any event, no sooner had the French Revolution begun, than any significant reactionary opposition ceased. The very excesses of revolutionary terror, it may be convincingly argued, were due not so much to the bloodthirstiness of the new masters as to the supine acceptance of the aristocratic victims, who willingly acceded to their own persecution and demise. A dispassionate look at the European scene after 1815 (one that ignores the din of wooden academic clichés) shows hardly any signs of return to the ways of the past. At most we notice some attempts at bridge-building to the Enlightenment (with its combination of liberal ideals and authoritarian methods). Metternich himself, the greatly demonized figure of the age, was nothing but an eighteenth-century liberal: he did not seek a reversal to feudal or medieval political patterns. Theocratically validated absolute monarchy had utterly disappeared, even in the case of Russian Emperor Alexander I, who himself tried to combine the values of enlightened liberalism with the Byzantine/Czarist traditions descending from his predecessors Ivan III and Peter I in a visionary/eccentric manner.

Evidence of the demise of a purely reactionary conservatism is provided by its supporters themselves; Joseph de Maistre perfectly understood that his only chance of conveying his views was to forge a discourse of paradox and provocation, to reach out toward brilliant and puzzling arguments, rather than to rely on tradition and precedent, which were crumbling. A similarly imaginative reinventor was Adam Müller, one of the first to resort openly to the aesthetic as a substitutive instrument of politics.

It might be argued whether, in a more moderate way, some key British conservatives (Coleridge and Southey, for example) did not also draw maps of future conservative possibilities, rather than try-

ing to describe continuations of the past. Chateaubriand and Balmes were early Christian-Democrats; Jovellanos was by no means more right wing than Burke, and at least one of the causes of the defection of the Spanish South-American colonies was clerical conservatism irate at the progressive changes in the imperial metropolis. Eastern Europe (at least Hungary, Russia, and Romania) was particularly rich in combinations of this kind, and so were the United States, the equivalent of Eastern Europe at the time (or for a while) as a margin of “core” Europe.

I want to return to a foreshortened account of a single book that I consider particularly important, and indeed, exemplary, for the period, as well as for the dynamic process of writing interactions discussed in this chapter. François Guizot had not only been an untiringly active political activist, but also an amazingly prolific author of a great variety of works, one of which masterpieces deserves to be highlighted here and flagged to the attention of the reader for several reasons. I refer to his eight-volume memoirs (see Guizot for future references to this edition). I am convinced that, more than any of his German political contemporaries (and even his English colleagues, perhaps with the exception of Sir Robert Peel), he was *the* Biedermeier political thinker *par excellence*. This opinion is to a good extent based on Guizot’s self-understanding of his own ideas and actions, as mirrored in the memoirs, a work that combines, almost perfectly, the (para-) literary and the historical. Thus, he becomes a peerless champion of moderate imperfection, both through his mode of writing and through his thinking and action.

It is difficult to organize Guizot’s stupendously large work according to strictly temporal principles. Nevertheless, we can say, in a very rough manner, that his best creations in the field of political philosophy belong to the 1820s and 1830s, that the acme of his political influence and power can be placed in the 1840s, that the period of his old age was devoted to religious issues (albeit often to matters of ecclesiastical politics such as the organization of French Protestants and the possibilities of an approach between Protestants and Catholics). Once we have said this, we can immediately recognize that throughout his life his literary interests remained a continuous preoccupation (whether as literary criticism and history, or as translation, mostly from English; among the latter I particularly

prize the Shakespeare prose translations, which are unfortunately less than well known, although they are among the best ever done in the French language). We can also recognize that Guizot's fall from power after 1848 encouraged him to adopt a much more reflective attitude and led him to write his exceptional memoirs, in which the literary, the historical, and the theoretical were combined better than in any other of his writings.

Guizot had belonged, rightly or wrongly (here reasonable observers may reasonably disagree) to the vast majority of French intellectuals who were convinced that, at least in the 1820s, and under the scepter of Charles X, France was in real danger of falling (II, 173 and in fact the whole of volume II) into the hands of absolutism. (Even someone as lucid and conservative as Chateaubriand shared this view, as we well know.) Ironically enough, in the 1840s, when he owned the keys of power, he was to suffer a similar fate: to be suspected of coveting a similar absolute power. His memoirs are largely devoted to a patient and detailed explanation of his intentions and of his thinking during this period. Personal or intimate facts are rare in these volumes. On the other hand, the perspectives opened onto the political life and onto its main characters are spectacularly wide.

From the point of view of this chapter, the most interesting thing is the imbrication of balances in the book. There is a balance between ideologies, which brings together the conservative and the liberal horizons of the time; there is another between the theoretical and the historical, and yet a third between the artistically narrative and the dryly factual. All three counteract and manage imperfection.

To begin with the third, it is expressed aesthetically above all by the gallery of excellent portraits of many leading figures of the two Restorations: Lafayette, Manuel, d'Argenson (I, 238–249), Chateaubriand (I, 260–1, 267), the duc de Richelieu (I, 211–212), Louis XVIII (I, 85, 87, 149–150), Fouché (I, 73–74), Martignac (I, 131), general Soult, Guizot's close collaborator (II, 359–360), the vivid description of Casimir Perrier's untimely illness and death (II, 312–313, also II, 177–197 and in many other places in vol. II), King Louis-Philippe as a Biedermeier figure (II, 273, 258–259), the somewhat sour depiction of Benjamin Constant (II, 143–5), Lafitte (II, 44–45, 162–165), and Thiers (II, 164–165; he saw him as a valid

interlocutor despite the political differences among them, II, 229). There are also the superb depictions of the atmosphere in the Paris of July 1830 (II, 319–323), and of the different literary/intellectual/political coteries and salons in their genealogy from the 1780s to the 1830s (II, 397–423).

These examples will suffice, although they do not exhaust the abundant gallery. Besides, we can easily regard them as mere symptoms of the more theoretical views in which the same balancing act can be recognized (on Guizot's "middlingness" or centrism see Crăiuțu, Diez del Corral, Kahan).

By the time he wrote his memoirs, Guizot had largely detached himself of the views of Victor Cousin (who had influenced him so deeply in youth) and in a way of those of Royer-Collard, who may be rightly described as the pioneer of the liberal "doctrinaires" (I, 82, 142–44, 162, 201, 333) and their informal leader at the beginning of the 1820s. He now spoke in cautiously favorable tones of Prince Metternich (II, 339, II, 290–291, 252–4). More important, he did not hesitate to depict himself (tacitly or aloud) as a post-Burkean (I, 27, 35, 61–2), nor, most specifically, did he lose any occasion to outline his "resistance" against the excesses of the French Revolution, or even of the (much more modest ones) of the 1830 actions (I, 202–210, III, 26, 30, II, 157—"politique d'ordre et de résistance" as opposed to politics of "mouvement et laisser-aller," II, 75, I, 301–312; II, 201–207).

In fact, to the extent to which Guizot defined himself as belonging to a party, it was neither liberal, nor conservative, nor anything else but the "resistance." He tried, whenever possible, to highlight the balance and the compatibility between tradition and liberty (I, 321, II, 217, 295–7, III, 14–15; note the typical and, in different formulations, recurring phrase "les principes... de liberté fortement constituée"—I, 183, I, 190–191, collaboration among classes—I, 147, force and success ought to be balanced by a respect for stable values and virtues—I, 134; need for decentralization and local initiative—I, 51, 189–190, III, 12–14). He lashed out against extremism (II, 33–34, 108–109, 169–170, II, 226–7, II, 236, I, 47) and also often suggested the need to follow the models of English constitutionalism (III, 18–23, I, 111, II, 260–261).

The narrative power of Guizot's memoirs comes out of its consistent dialogue between explosion and containment: it is an admirable comprehensive story illustrating the manner in which moderation controls rebellion. (For Guizot, the "doctrinaires" were the rational alternative to the absolute rationalism of the revolution—I, 157–159.)

VIII

I arrive here at my conclusions. What we notice in examining this dialectic between historiography and historical fiction in the early nineteenth century is a kind of feedback and shuttling back and forth between two domains, an intertwining that is rarely equaled at other points in history. In the case of the early nineteenth-century approach, preferences, value choices, and intentions are outlined in an honest and open way.

The interesting thing in studying the historical writing of the early nineteenth century is that authors opted for a very special relationship between the subjective and the objective. Although it was not theorized until the philosophical works of Dilthey appeared, in actual practice, this discursive procedure remained amply illustrated. The relationship between subjectivity and objectivity was understood not only in the early nineteenth century, but even later, as the instrumental and auxiliary use of subjectivity in order to penetrate more deeply and more efficiently inside the dynamics of historical evolution.

The historians and novelists of early nineteenth-century Romanticism certainly regarded themselves as indispensable collaborators, to the extent that they considered that the writing of history required all faculties: emotion, imagination and empathy, along with reason and empirical imagination. In fact, subjectivity was seen as something indispensable, and the errors of past historians were attributed to their failure to make use of it more courageously. Victor Hugo formulated this even more bluntly (and one might say, a bit simplistically): "La Vendée ne peut être complètement expliquée que si la légende complète l'histoire; il faut l'histoire pour l'ensemble et la légende pour le détail" (Hugo, 232).

Our examination of the early nineteenth-century literary and historical discourses illustrates some fascinating truths. Both literature

and the type of history writing that is self-aware of its gaps and incompletions end up by seeking out each other. Even in combination they are wide open to their own analysis and organization under the sign of imperfection. On the contrary, exactly where literature with its imperfections is absent, there absolute and “infinite” tendencies have room for expansion. Our parallels and comparisons, I believe, suggest this rather conclusively. While history injected with literary procedures is tempered, qualified, and amended, the utopian discourse, as well as, in the long run, utopian practices find themselves unleashed, “liberated” as they are from the more saturnine temper of any literary implication. The stark contrast between literary-tinged historiography (or the historical novel for that matter) and utopian discourses and images seems to me an extremely powerful argument in favor of the interpretation of the literary domain as the area in which imperfection and defeat can be most fully explored.

Notes

1 See Rigney, *Imperfect Histories: The Elusive Past and the Legacy of Romantic Historicism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 2001.

2 Waldemar Zacharsiewicz, “The Rise of Cultural Nationalism in the New World: the Scottish Element and Example” in Drescher, Volkel, eds. 315–334. Kaufman, 93–137 offers a gross and simplistic reading of Scott’s early novels; still he has the merit of understanding that the author had philosophical intentions and that he is on the same wavelength with Burke.

3 See the excellent essay of E. M. Cioran, which demonstrates admirably the connection between the linguistic, and the ideological in one case, but with wider implications.

4 It will be noticed that I confine myself in this chapter to writings in prose. This is because my chosen topic is the relationship between historiography and fiction. However, the early nineteenth century was tremendously rich in historical drama and poetry: from Southey, Shelley, Scott, and Keats to Ludwig Uhland and Victor Hugo in poetry, from Grabbe and Platen to (again) Victor Hugo in drama, to name just a very few names. The historical dimension could be in subject matter or in echoes of style, and it did not exclude actual *rewritings* as in the case of Brentano’s “Italian” folktales and in many other cases.

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CHAPTER 4

EAST/CENTRAL EUROPE AS A CONFIRMATORY CASE STUDY

I

I will begin directly with this chapter's thesis, leaving my conclusions to the end, along with some explanations as to how this helps the whole argument of the present book. My thesis is that over a large area of Central Europe—roughly covering what is now Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, the former Yugoslavia, Romania—society was pervaded by a common ethos, one that differed in many key points from the “Protestant work ethic.” The latter had been indispensable in the formation of modern capitalism and liberal democracy in Anglo-Saxon lands, and in Northwestern Europe in general. The Central European ethos was focused, not on gainful labor and individual achievement, but rather on the acquisition of information and the communitarian recognition of the primacy of learning as a standard of merit and social advancement.

I will first try to explain the ideological origins and the manner of dissemination of this ethos. Second, I will try to show the social and class dimensions of this ethical and historical phenomenon. Specifically, I will adduce examples indicating that the Central European ethos was widely spread among all social classes, from the poorest through the middle classes to the aristocracy, and among all ethnic groups; this can prove that the whole area shared a belief in epistemology as the provider of valid rules for social mobility and social organization. Third, I will examine the cultural geography of the phenomenon, i.e., the historical-geographical range of the learning ethos, the extent to which it defines a common cultural identity for Central Europe, similarities and differences with other parts of Europe (Germany and Russia, France). Other issues, e.g., the decline and/or end of the Central European ethos in its area of birth, its unexpected survival/revival in North America, as well as

the relevance of this “Central European” ethos for the world at the turn of the twentieth century into the twenty-first, will be touched on in passing. Finally, and not least of all, this broad and deep socio-geographic phenomenon will be shown as illustrative of the discourse of imperfection and defeat.

The process has to do with the institutionalization of Biedermeier concepts and attitudes, and their persistence well into the twentieth century over large areas of Central Europe. I have explained elsewhere (Nemoianu 1985; 120–60) that the nature of Romanticism differed sharply in Western and Eastern Europe. The essence of the former was visionary and revolutionary, aiming at a regeneration of the human race and a breakdown of the separations between the faculties (reason and imagination in particular), as well as those between consciousness and nature, or reality. These superhuman and utopian goals could not be pursued over long stretches of time, nor could such visionary and revolutionary tension be sustained in writing. High Romanticism in England, Germany, and France was soon replaced by a more tempered and moderate set of intentions and writing modes, a “lower” Romanticism that, in its Central European form at least, often came to be called “Biedermeier;” this lower Romanticism flourished mainly between 1815 and 1848.

Central and Eastern European literatures hardly experienced the intensities of High Romanticism. Instead, they forged their own amalgam of Enlightenment, Romantic, and pre-Romantic elements, and combined this with the social realism and intimate Biedermeier micro-harmonies. In a word, these literatures skipped High Romanticism, somehow pretending that they had experienced the upheaval and effort towards human regeneration via revolution and the Romantic cosmic embrace via a totalizing consciousness. Scott and Byron (rather than Wordsworth and Hölderlin) were immediately understood and accepted all over Eastern Europe. Biedermeier literary attitudes are apparent everywhere. Mickiewicz and Stowacki among the Poles explored the relationship between dream, relativity, rebellion, hopelessness, and *Geborgenheit*. The Czechs Josef Kajetán Tyl and F. J. Rubeš, or the Hungarians Mihály Vörösmarty, János Garay, and Miklós Jósika could be immediately recognized as coevals and coequals of Western lower Romantics, while the Serbian Jovan Steria Popović and the Croats August Šenoa and

Ante Kovačić, with their pastoral-idyllic bases, can be easily perceived as Biedermeier writers.

Not only is it the case that this kind of Biedermeier literary writing was continued for well over a century and remained a favorite of large popular and middlebrow audiences, but its social resonance was even more powerful. Biedermeier literature reflected a certain state of mind and a certain social situation, which it in turn influenced or even shaped.

We can, as was mentioned earlier, speak of a certain institutionalization of Biedermeier attitudes in Central Europe and their integration in the perception of national identity. After all, these first responses to the impact of modernity coincided with a revival of national consciousness on the part of, among others, Czechs, Hungarians, Jews, Romanians, and Slovenes. The types of sensibility discovered and expressed in the Biedermeier age, the intellectual debates initiated at that time, the great names produced then, shaped the community consciousness of such groups and channeled their modes of thinking until at least the middle of the twentieth century; further progress in social activity, in literature and science, used this Biedermeier framework as a background or even as a foundation. The development of the Central European learning ethos thus took place in close dialectical interpenetration with the values of the Biedermeier and at roughly the same time (i.e., the decades before and after 1800).

Both the Biedermeier-idyllic tradition and its Weimarian roots came out of an effort at synthesizing Enlightenment rationalism and Romantic communitarianism and organicity that went on in other spheres as well and produced important results. (In my opinion, Marxism came from the same sources.) Besides these three main traditions, other factors can be seen as contributory or accommodating. One of them is the Catholic tradition that prevailed over large areas of Central Europe for many centuries.

The Catholic framework had been characteristically one in which orderly upward mobility, an avenue to success by test and competition, was possible. The rationalism that imbued the ideological and even the theological discourses of Catholicism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries fitted in with the demands of modernization and fed the new ethos. Additionally, the rationalism that Catholi-

cism shared with most of European public life in those two centuries was intermeshed with an organic conception of nature and society (Johnston 1972). This post-Leibnizian, Theresian, and then Romantic view carried with it solidarist and communitarian implications that diminished or weakened the tendencies towards individualism and competitiveness.

Another contributory element—although I would like to be more tentative on this point—may well have been a trust in science that could go all the way to its reification or fetishization. This was true in one way or another all over Europe in the nineteenth century. It would be worth investigating whether indeed, as I believe to be the case, one can detect in Central Europe more often than elsewhere a specific, almost aesthetic delight in the face of scientific laws and discoveries, as well as a kind of almost childish or innocent trust in the power and goodness of science.

One highly important additional factor in the development of the ethos was the way in which it was unabashedly reinforced by officialdom and by governmental power for over a century. Under Maria Theresia and Joseph II, the whole considerable weight of the state was brought to bear in the direction of a transformation of Catholic harmonization into learning impulses and motivations. This was a highly deliberate kind of decision that was followed by some of the smaller neighboring countries (East and West), but that otherwise sharply differentiates the Danubian basin from Western Europe.

The Puritan/Protestant work ethic was defined by Max Weber in a seminal article published in two parts in the journal *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* (1904–05). This was later expanded into *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* (1920), the first of three volumes comprising Weber's essays on the sociology of religions in which Weber responded to critics, besides developing his ideas more fully.

Weber started from the fact that in the seventeenth century capital accumulation can be widely seen as an aim in itself, not as a means to an end, and he attributed this to Calvinist/Puritan asceticism. True, such attitudes can also be found inside Catholic speculative discussion and elsewhere. But only in the Anglo-Saxon countries and in Northwestern Europe does the capitalist/Protestant

connection acquire a systematic character—bookkeeping systems, a bureaucratized nation-state, a formalized and codified legal system, and other features are connected with it. A certain congeniality or “elective affinity” between capitalism and Calvinism made the two reinforce each other; the Puritan-Calvinist-capitalist nexus blossomed into a full-fledged system of moral-religious virtues. Individualism was bolstered through the doctrine of personal saintliness and a private direct relationship with God. Justification takes place through work, success, human self-discipline, and perfectibility, both moral and material. Acquisition is sacramentalized. Temperance, resolution, industry, frugality, cleanliness, and chastity are among the foremost virtues. Failure and poverty could be regarded as signs of God’s disfavor, while wealth, as acquired through industriousness, could be taken as an indication of divine approval.

There is no question but that these features played a key role in many societies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Furnham 1990), and, in America at least (through the somewhat secularized version of Benjamin Franklin or simply through family tradition), they continued and continue to play an exceptionally important part in shaping public discourse and both private and public behavior.

I would argue that, among the numerous competing ethical strains in Western societies (Furnham 1990: 214–32), the Central European learning ethos should be considered as particularly prominent. It grew out, as I said earlier, of a combination of Enlightenment and Romantic features. It posited that the liberation and advancement of the human individual or group was tantamount to increasing access to science, information, and humanistic values. The immersion in the values of high culture and professional competence were supposed to be rewarded (indeed, as often as not, in the Danubian area, they *were* rewarded) by access to a higher level of humanity, integrative acceptance, broader horizons, and, ultimately, by liberation and growth.

The Central European learning ethos was truly comprehensive and inclusive. It applied to the peasantry: ceaseless toiling, a deliberate limitation of living standards, stinting and hoarding were justified by the hope that a younger generation would be able to pass the barrier separating it from full liberated humanity. It applied massively to the middle classes and perhaps most emphatically to

the Jewish middle classes in their effort at social integration and cultural acceptance. It applied to the working class and to the large bureaucratic apparatus of the Dual Monarchy and its successor states, shaping and pervading the civilizational framework and the sustaining values of duty, fair order, honesty and legality, punctuality and responsible behavior (the symbolic embodiment of which became for a while Emperor Franz Joseph I). It informed the aristocratic strata in their search for an existential rationale and for some positional legitimation in a gradually modernizing world.

The Central European learning ethos postulated the world as a vast arena in which affirmation and promotion were possible through orderly and fair tests, struggles, and strategies. It was a vast framework, but a coherent and unified one. The fairness was implicit in the fact that what was at stake was the acquisition, not of wealth, but of information, a nonmaterial, but quantitatively measurable element. Information or knowledge, as I will try to show later, was in this context the basis even for pursuits that are difficult to reduce to merely rational molds, such as literary-artistic creation and warcraft. Learning could justify wealth and high position, and it was an avenue open to all classes. It was also the *locus* of truth, beauty and goodness that became man's part through learning.¹ Increased learning of course carried its own rewards, but also became the focus for industriousness, discipline, polished manners, socialization skills, and many other virtues that it helped channel into society at large. It was, therefore, considered fitting that it should also be recognized as rewarded by God and society, all the more so as the learning ethos seemed to provide a happy reconciliation between the individual will and striving, on the one hand, and society-wide needs and integration on the other.

II

A good way to begin adducing some evidence is by recalling the name of Joseph von Sonnenfels (1732–1817), who has become a figure of much historical interest in the last few decades. Sonnenfels is an emblematic figure for many reasons: because of his rise

and career, but also because of his ideas and his actual influence in Central European society.

His grandfather, Rabbi Michael the Pious (Kann 1960: 147) was chief rabbi of Brandenburg; his father, Lipman Perlin, emigrated to the Habsburg lands, converted to Christianity under the name of Alois Wiener, was appointed professor of Oriental languages at the University of Vienna in 1745, published grammars and theological treatises, and, in 1746, was ennobled with the title of von Sonnenfels. One of Perlin-Wiener's sons, Franz, became a governmental bureaucrat. His eldest son, Joseph, studied at the Piarist college in Nikolasburg and twice at the University of Vienna (philology and law), learned to speak nine languages, became a journalist, writer, and Freemason activist, worked as instructor at the Theresianum college, and ultimately, after 1765, engaged in governmental service. He was an Aulic councilor, a censor, and a university president. His old age, after 1790, was marked by numerous awards and honors—elevation to the rank of baron, honorary citizenship of Vienna, praise by great Europeans (Mirabeau, for example) and, not least, the dedication of a sonata by Beethoven. Sonnenfels was close to Empress Maria Theresia (Kann 1960: 236) and, to some extent, to Joseph II, insofar as he was a spokesman for the values of the Enlightenment.

In his political philosophy, Sonnenfels strongly advocated a coherent and stratified society within a strong “state” framework. A Rousseauesque *Gesellschaftsgeist* was meant to be enhanced by general education, striving for social welfare, and operating within the framework of constitutional government (ibid.: 168). Such an enlightened monarchic or aristocratic regime, with self-imposed restrictions on its privileges, was meant to preserve “the amenities of social stratification for the higher classes and at the same time protect[s] the lower ones from license. Extraordinary merits and abilities may even open to the burgher the way to those exalted offices which by right of tradition belong to the noble” (ibid.: 170–71).

There were two main directions in which Sonnenfels acted either in a theoretical or in a practical way (or in both) in order to mold the state/society relations. One was education. He argued eloquently in favor of the social utility of young aristocrats, who ought to match birth with merit, virtue, and cultivation, and be turned into a

bureaucratic class. At the same time, he argued for upward mobility, openness, and advancement by competition on the basis of knowledge, ability, and professional competence.

The other field in which Sonnenfels' contribution may well have been decisive was that of legislative and administrative texts. He wrote a manual on style in affairs of government and was a key player in the commission for the creation of the new Austrian law codes (Kann 1960: 152–53). In the long term, the legal language thus generated had a considerable effect on the shaping of the learning ethos. As much as any other single person, Sonnenfels must be considered an architect and prime mover of that ethos in Central Europe.

It is clear that Sonnenfels was only one participant in a much broader movement, including cameralists (like Justi), mercantilists and, gradually, even the Romantics he despised. It is significant that Sonnenfels was extremely active in a society for the promotion of the vernacular, *Deutsche Gesellschaft*, in the 1760s. Societies of this type were soon to become crucial features of the political-cultural landscape throughout Eastern Europe. *Matice česká* (founded in 1831), *Matica srpska* (1826), *Matica hrvatska* (1842), and the Transylvanian Romanian *Astra* (1867) are just some of the more prominent. They were all predicated on the idea that political actions, and—even more broadly—national identity, are dependent upon and located in the area of the cultivation of knowledge and beauty, and the protection of the language.

These societies acted as pools of talent and think-tanks for politicians, and ultimately served as a referential level for what was good and what was practicable. They were also designed as models of ideal societies, in which social interaction would transcend class interests by establishing common standards of learning and of striving for intellectual and spiritual betterment. Specifically, these societies worked towards creating national museums and libraries, collecting funds for student fellowships, editing manuscripts, and publishing cultural journals, but at the same time bringing out primers and textbooks, disseminating science, encouraging arts and crafts, and fostering an awareness of history. At the same time, they provided a forum for debates regarding the future orientation of the community.

Naturally, there were differences between the various societies. The Romanian *Astra* may be said to have emphasized schooling in its different forms. *Matice česka* seems primarily to have encouraged literature in the vernacular, translations, and scientific pursuits; significantly, it was formed in connection with, and almost as a subsidiary of, the National Czech Museum (est. 1818). The promotion of national consciousness, the regularization of linguistic rules, and editorial work prevailed in *Matica srpska*; through its leader, Jovan Hadžić, it also engaged in substantial polemics on the tradition vs. progress issue. The idea for *Matica hrvatska*, interesting to note, came up in 1829 during discussions with Czech circles (specifically the poet Jan Kollar), and its founder, Count Janko Drasković, who from the beginning strongly emphasized the link between sciences, literature, and patriotic (general) education. Similar societies were organized by the Hungarians (1825), Slovenes (1864), Slovaks (1863). The Hungarian association was turned into a national academy in 1830; Romania established its own national Academy in Bucharest in 1867; Austria in 1897; in the course of the century, national academies were also founded in Prague, Zagreb, and Cracow.

National affirmation was a declared purpose of all these cultural organizations. Despite this, it would be erroneous to regard the movement as nationalist, separatist, and anti-modern. National affirmation was seen as a contribution to universal culture and science, as a way of inserting the community into the general progress of learning and civilization. One other way of looking at these cultural-political societies is to note that they were part of a whole associative wave in the Danubian basin in the nineteenth century. At that time, democratic processes (as opposed to their much sounder constitutional and legal bureaucratic framework) were unevenly and incompletely developed in this area, when compared to the state of affairs in France, England, or the United States. This flourishing associative life was a very effective substitute for some of the missing features of democratic activity. It provided outlets for a variety of groups and a mode of exercising rights and faculties, thus contributing to intellectual as well as political growth.²

It has even been suggested that associations came into being as a kind of substitute for vanishing "organic" forms (e.g., guilds, cor-

porations, and so on) (Bruckmüller 1985: 337; Cohen 1981: 38). In any case, their original models emerged first in Austria in the 1740s, either as learned academies or as “patriotic-economic” associations devoted to agricultural or artisan pursuits. It is interesting to note that very different entities, such as Chambers of Commerce, labor unions, insurance companies, mutual credit associations, and cooperatives of various kinds, grew out of these beginnings a century or so later (Bruckmüller 1985: 338–9, 400–405). The total number of all such organizations grew, in the Austrian half of the monarchy, from 4,331 in 1867 to over 15,800 in 1880, and they functioned in urban as well as in rural areas (ibid.: 399).

In the Hungarian or Transleithanian half of the Habsburg monarchy, less than 7% of the population was endowed with voting rights as late as 1910. In 1881, however, in this country of 16 million inhabitants, no less than 3,995 different associations were registered. This number had grown from 579 associations in 1862, a mere 20 years earlier, and was to continue growing up to an estimated 11,000 just before World War I (Molnár, Reszler, eds. 1989: 55). By contrast, only 55 such organizations existed in the same territory in the eighteenth century. Also by contrast, late nineteenth-century France had only a fraction of this number (ibid.: 590). It is estimated that about 50% of these associations pursued cultural and intellectual aims: reading circles, singing groups, *Schulvereine* (i.e., groups for the setting up of private schools), groups for the dissemination of scientific knowledge and religious cultivation, and clubs for political debate. (The most prestigious association of this kind in Hungary was the National Casino Club of Budapest, which was very exclusive, but which built a considerable library and spent considerable funds on supporting cultural activities.) What all this shows is that, whether sponsored by ethnic Hungarians or by minorities, societies of this type fell into a category that by definition placed the values of a common humane civilization uppermost and sought specific ways of inhabiting it.

In Bohemia, and notably in Prague, we can witness the coexistence of Czech associations, headed by the vibrant and flourishing *Matice česká* (supported primarily by the Czech nobility and middle classes; its founders had been Counts Klebelsberg and Kolowrat, along with scholars, journalists, and clergy), along with a network

of associations of the declining but still vigorous German Bohemian minority. These provided interactive opportunities for a cross section of the intellectual and productive middle classes (Cohen 1981: 172, 57). The Romanian *Astra*, while founded and sustained by the community's middle and upper classes, also received warm support from rural communities (Matei 1986: 37).

Through its discourse structures, as well as through its avowed value goals, the Central European learning ethos mediated inter-ethnic tensions and, at the very least, provided common ground for a debating arena. The same was true on a social level. In different ways, all social classes admitted the primacy of this ethos or paid lip service to it—no mean feat in itself—and accepted its implicit rules of subordination and advancement. This is definitely not—let me state it once and for all—to claim that class conflict or economic inequalities or social consciousness had been abolished in any way, which would be obviously absurd. It is merely to point out that there were strong and specific countervailing forces in this geographical and historical area. In a sense, the strength of the Central European learning ethos derived precisely from the variety and intensity of the conflicts (national and social) it counteracted. With these thoughts in mind, I will engage in a cursory review of some class attitudes in relation to this ethical framework.

III

In the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in the independent Balkan states, and in the different Polish provinces, the aristocracy had preserved strong economic and social positions, sometimes even legal privileges. Nevertheless, these countries or areas were modernizing fast, their very structure was changing, the authority of the West was looming large. In different ways, local aristocracies (not only their socially and ethically alert members, but also those who, in an intelligently selfish vein, wanted to preserve some socio-political relevance for their class and kin) pragmatically adopted an ethos of learning and service as a convenient road towards modern relevance.

It may be useful to note here that, between 1800 and 1850 in all the areas under discussion, sizable sections of the aristocracy (high-

er or lower) saluted the coming of radical historical change and contributed greatly to it. This was also the case in England, France, and Russia, but it nonetheless remains striking to note what large part of the nobility in Hungary, Romania, and particularly Austria worked towards socio-historical change in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries. In Austria, families with names such as Fürstenberg, Auersperg, Stadion, Colloredo-Mannsfeld, Schwarzenberg, Schönberg-Hartenstein, Thurn und Taxis belonged to the highest and most select stratum of the Austrian aristocracy; they were often described as “Austrian aristocratic Whigs” as early as 1848, but particularly in the second half of the nineteenth century (Gollwitzer 1956: 188–92).

Service and knowledge came together most logically, of course, in the military careers that were a traditional and favorite field of activity for the Central European aristocracy. In the Habsburg army in 1896, 22% of commissioned officers and 72% of generals bore noble titles (Hajdu in Molnár, Reszler, eds. 1989: 66–68). These were not swaggering mercenaries or swordsmen, but, as was often said, “bureaucrats on horseback,” whose behavior, duties, and level of knowledge were prescribed in great detail. Moreover, the army—like the church (or churches)—was traditionally an instrument of social mobility and provided interaction on meritocratic bases for all kinds of individuals (Rothenberg 1976: 118–28). Already in 1843, the officer corps, while in majority of German descent, included “officers of Spanish, French, Walloon, Danish, Irish and English derivation” (*ibid.*: 76–81) that emphasized meritocratic and political motivations rather than origin (social class or ethnic background); professionalism had to prevail over voluntary and sentimental modes of relating to the army (Rothenberg 1976: 83). Conrad von Hötzendorf, the last major figure in the leadership of the Austro-Hungarian army, is a good example of such a mixture of professionalism, technical knowledge, aristocracy, and meritocratic and dynastic attitudes that transcended class barriers.

Here is the place to emphasize that the high percentage of aristocrats in the military has also to be viewed in light of the fact that large numbers of commoners who reached the upper levels of the military ladder were absorbed into the nobility by titles granted on merit. A first- or second-generation nobility of merit was thus cre-

ated that served as a bridge between the nobility and the commoners, but also as a model for the latter. This was true not only in the military, but in many other fields: business, statecraft, engineering, the sciences, and so forth.

Perhaps the best example is provided by the Jewish minority in the Austrian, as well as in the Hungarian, half of the Empire. William McCagg's classic study of Jewish progress (e.g., the number of Jewish nobles in Hungary grew from 4 in 1824 to 346 in 1918; see McCagg 1973: 25) presents case after case of association between economic advance, ennoblement, and vigorous intellectual pursuit, each successive action justifying and legitimizing the previous one. This also reinforced an image of the aristocracy as a class with intellectual and educational relevance, one equally connected to social achievement and cultural accomplishment.

Throughout the Habsburg monarchy, the purpose of attracting achievers in the most varied fields into the aristocratic class was energetically pursued (the parents of Georg von Lukács, von Neumann, and Robert von Musil were so honored). This can be explained only by admitting that there was a guiding social model of the aristocracy as a class of knowledge and cultural merit. This process had already begun in the eighteenth century. Thus, in the first four decades of the century, only 4.5% of the creation of nobility was justified by economic achievement, whereas by the end of the century, the figure had risen to 18.2% (Bruckmüller 1985: 253). Ethnic groups devoid of a traditional aristocracy (e.g., the Transylvanian Romanians or the Serbians of Hungary) were endowed with a peerage based on military, clerical, economic or scholarly achievements. In the period 1804–1918, a total of 8,931 noble titles were granted, over 4,000 of which went for military achievement, 2,157 for bureaucratic or political merits, over 1,000 for financial or manufacturing prominence, and almost 300 for science and art (Siegert 1971).

In any case, the percentages of educated or highly educated members of the aristocracy were quite high, superior both to those of the same class in the past and to other social classes. Such percentages can be found in the politically active class in Hungary, Romania, Austria, and Croatia. There is impressive evidence of the feverish efforts of the Hungarian nobility around 1800 and in the

first half of the century to provide their offspring with suitable collegiate academies and, where this was not possible, to generate syllabi and educational tools for their families on their own (Csáky 1981: 213–17). In the first decades of the century, the pursuit of higher education in the West (mostly in France and Germany, much less often in England or Italy) also became standard procedure for Hungarians, Romanians, and Poles. Young aristocrats pioneered this kind of experience, and played a decisive role in disseminating reform and progressive ideas in their countries of origin.

There were other, narrower, but highly efficient, ways in which allegiance to the learning ethos could be expressed. One was the protection and encouragement of the arts; collecting art, Maecenas-like patronage, and the funding of intellectual pursuits provided the conditions for a lively interaction between meritocracy and aristocracy. Rilke at Duino, in the castle of princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis, is a famous example, as is the patronage of the Esterházy for Haydn and, on a smaller scale, the Fürstenberg family in Bohemia's protection of the poet Karl Egon Ebert and the historian Frank Xaver Kraus, and their support for the publication of the first authoritative Bach edition (Gollwitzer 1956: 313). The Romanian composer George Enescu was protected by the Cantacuzino princes and later married a family princess, while Count Ferenc Széchenyi founded Hungary's National Museum and Library (Janos 1982: 50).

More than a few members of the nobility themselves became active and creative in the intellectual life of the time. Baron József Eötvös (his son was an illustrious physicist) and Count Széchenyi are difficult to match in importance in the intellectual and cultural life of Hungarians in the early and mid-nineteenth century. The role of the Croatian count Drasković in the cultural life of his country has already been mentioned. Romanian aristocrats played key roles in establishing the foundations of mathematical, scientific, and historical education and research in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Romanian linguistics would have been impossible without Alexandru Rosetti; G. M. Cantacuzino, and N. I. Ghica-Budești were leading historians and theoreticians of Romanian architecture; Aristide Caradja and Emil Racoviță were internationally known figures in entomology and speleology respectively; Ioan Cantacuzino founded immunology and experimental pathology in Romania;

Alex. I. Ghica was a leading mathematician, while Henri Catargi, Helène Vacaresco, Lucia Sturza, Martha Bibesco, and Matyla Ghyka were outstanding figures in their country's arts and letters. Similar lists could be drawn up for other Central European countries.

In politics, the number of aristocratic figures is overwhelming—at least until World War I—in Hungary, Austria, and Romania: Metternich and Schwarzenberg, Apponyi and Andrássy, Știrbey and Cantacuzino, among many others. Nor was this presence confined to the top national leadership. Of the bureaucracy in four key offices in Hungary (Interior, Commerce, Finance, and the Prime Minister's Chancery), the gentry represented an average of 56.7% in 1899, and 45.9% in 1910 (Janos 1982: 110–11). Also in Hungary, the number of aristocratic members in the House of Representatives varied between 10.8% and 16.4% during the three decades between 1875–1905 (*ibid.*: 100).

This activity and presence should not be seen merely as an expression of socio-economic interests or as power exercises, but also as a defense and legitimation of status by achievement. Moreover, in most of these cases, education, knowledge, and taste accompanied or even superseded descent, ancestry, and wealth. Statesmanship, no less than the military profession, can be seen as an area of vocational specialization and applied cognitive activity for many members of the nobility (Gollwitzer 1956: 304–06).

IV

Moving on to the middle classes, the case becomes much clearer. Indeed, it can be stated as a general proposition that in Central Europe the middle class was largely a product of the complex intermeshing of Enlightenment, Romanticism, and Biedermeier, rather than the producer of these, as may have been the case in the West. Socio-demographic movements were captured, directed, and regulated by these mental (and sometimes organizational) frameworks. Thus the learning ethos was “naturally” adopted or absorbed by the growing bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century.

Probably the most striking example can be provided by the Jewish middle class and upper-middle class of the region. The studies

of Victor Karády make frequent use of the term “sur-scolarisation” (over-schooling) in connection with the Jewish middle class, primarily to suggest their massive orientation towards the liberal professions as an avenue to socially upward mobility. Around 1900, close to half the physicians, lawyers, managers, and entrepreneurs, and over 30% of the engineers, journalists, and veterinary surgeons in the Hungarian half of the Empire and in selected parts of the Austrian half (e.g., Bukowina or Galicia) were of Jewish descent (Karády in Molnár, Reszler, eds. 1989: 89). At the University of Vienna, 30% of the students in medicine were Jewish in 1869–70 and 48% in 1889–90; at the school of law the percentages for the same years were 19.8% and 22% respectively (Pollak 1984: 54). Just prior to World War I, 18% of the reserve officers in the Habsburg army were Jewish, even though only approximately 5% of the monarchy’s total population was Jewish (Rothenberg 1976: 128). This is an excellent gauge since the reserve-officer effectives were traditionally stocked with and drawn from middle-class and professional categories.

Between 1870 and 1910, pupils of Jewish and partly Jewish descent represented approximately 40% of the alumni of 11 select *gymnasia* (elite high schools) in Vienna (Beller in Oxaal, Pollak, Botz, eds. 1987: 39–58). If one takes into account all the *gymnasia* in Vienna, the statistical proportion is 30% Jewish, corresponding to a population slightly higher than 10% in the Vienna metropolitan area (Rozenblit 1983: 99). This was the highway to integration in Western culture. As one researcher writes, “The educators who constructed the curriculum firmly believed that the study of Latin and Greek grammar was instrumental in developing logical thought patterns; that the study of classical literature was essential for the development of a taste for beauty and simplicity; and that concentration on ancient history and philosophy would inculcate noble and heroic sentiments in young scholars” (ibid.: 101). Even if George Steiner’s quasi-identification of *Kulturbürgertum* with Jewishness in Central Europe (Steiner 1967: 170–72) may be exaggerated, it remains clear that by the turn of the century the role of the Jewish middle and upper classes was decisive in fields such as psychology (Freud), music (Schönberg, Mahler), philosophy (the logical positivists), economics, political and legal theory. It may be worth

repeating what I said earlier: a double motivational line may have strengthened the adherence of Central European Jews to the learning ethos—a Talmudic tradition, as well as an eagerness to grasp social opportunity.

An intense internalization of an adherence to the Central European learning ethos, however, was not confined to the Jews alone. As Steven Beller says, “in Austrian German society as well there was a tradition of learning, especially among the bureaucracy, in order to keep [and earn—*my note*] one’s status as a family in the governing elite” (Beller in Don, Karády, eds. 1990: 169). In Hungary “by 1846 there were 33,000 people who qualified as college graduates and it was calculated that there were twice as many licensed attorneys per capita than in the Western or Cisleithanian (on the whole, more developed) part of the Empire” (Janos 1982: 42). The number of bureaucrats increased by leaps and bounds. The central administration grew from 60,776 in 1890 to 119,937 in 1910, and the total number of administrative employees to 387,922 in 1914, that is 3.5% of the active labor force. (By contrast, in Germany the figure was 0.9% in 1913, and in Great Britain 0.8% in 1920 [Janos 1982: 94].)

It seems clear that, in a broader sense, “sur-scolarisation” was an area-wide feature. Bohemia had 1,500 elementary schools in 1822; by 1918 the number had grown to over 6,100. By 1930 illiteracy in the whole of Czechoslovakia was down to 4.1%, the lowest percentage in the area (Korbel 1977: 64), but also a much lower rate than in the Iberian Peninsula at the time, or in the United States today. In the independent half of Romania, the number of students in primary and elementary schools rocketed from 186,403 to 727,588 in just one decade (1895–1905) and literacy rose from 22% in the nineteenth century to 43% in 1915 (59% for the population of military age) (Janos in Jowitt, ed. 1978: 98).

In Austria and its provinces the number of administrators grew from 130,000 in 1841 to 336,000 in 1900. To process this increasing number of highly educated bureaucrats and establish fair rules of advancement, a series of increasingly detailed provisions was enacted between 1873 (“Rang und Gehaltschemata”) and 1914 (“Dienstpragmatik”). These indicated what educational assumptions, degrees of knowledge, tests and promotion principles should

be checked or applied (Bruckmüller 1985: 397). Similar, but somewhat laxer, appointment and selection procedures were set up in the Hungarian half of the Empire (Janos 1982: 96).

Obviously, rules of this kind could not be applied to the entrepreneurial middle and upper-middle class. There is every indication, however, that the capitalist and merchant class felt, not liberated, but frustrated and unfulfilled because it had not been legitimated by a more complete submission to a methodology of advancement derived from the learning ethos. A good part of the socio-cultural behavior of this upwardly mobile population can be explained by a desire to compensate, even to overcompensate, for this perceived lack. Thus, the breeding of educated, creative, and brilliant offspring (McCagg 1972) can be seen as such a compensatory legitimation. More generally, it is difficult to exaggerate the almost unanimous allegiance of the middle class in Central Europe (in Germany also) to the slogan “Besitz und Bildung” (property and culture), or to the linkage of the “civilian” component of the word “Bürger” with its connotations: “Bildung,” “Aufklärung,” “Vernunft” (cultivation, enlightenment, reason) (Bruckmüller 1985: 319–20, 342).

Bourgeois patronage of the arts and aesthetic habits closely imitated those of the cultivated nobility. In Bohemia and Austria during the eighteenth century, aristocratic patronage in music and art had encouraged the development of artistic creativity, particularly in music and architecture, somewhat less in painting and least effectively in literature. In Prague such patronage was expressed by several dozen “Hauskapellen” of the high aristocracy (Auersperg, Claus-Gallas, Lichtenstein, Lobkowitz, Questenberg, Wrtby, and many others) (Bosl, ed. 1979: 570). This socio-cultural form was imitated in the nineteenth century in two different ways. The first was the emergence, at least in the large urban centers, of upper middle-class patrons of the arts who tried to emulate the high nobility (Reissberger in Zeman, ed. 1982: 762, on art collecting). The Wittgenstein and Todesco salons and patronage were famous in Vienna just before 1900; Em. Gozdu and the Hurmuzaki brothers acted in similar ways for the Romanians, and so on. The second, more modest, but much more widely spread, form of imitation was the emergence all over Central Europe of cultural associations

devoted to reading, cultural betterment, and musical practice; even more widespread were music and reading (even theatricals) exercised in small family groups or among friends (Bosl, ed. 1979; also Schamschula in Zeman, ed. 1982: 120).

Architecture was an equally expressive medium for the values of the middle classes and their conviction that class differences could be overcome by cultural-epistemological means. Thus, while the whole Biedermeier cast of mind is undoubtedly involved with the Central European learning ethos, it may be argued that Biedermeier architecture and interior decoration in particular expressed an attempt by the middle classes to appropriate historical tradition for itself in a specific way and with a certain reduction in scale (Bosl, ed. 1979: 569). Different as the imposing Ringstrasse in Vienna might be from Biedermeier quaintness in its appearance, it seems to be the consequence of similar aspirations. In both cases, liberal architectural statements were both syncretistic and pluralistic: the tradition of creativity and high-value was being conquered from the inside (Schorske 1981: 24–115).

We can even venture further and wonder whether the phenomena described by Arno Mayer as “the persistence of the old regime” (Mayer 1981)—for example, the way in which capitalist and middle-class contents found expression in the guise of century-old structures (feudal, monarchic, traditional)—could not perhaps be seen under a different and more favorable light. The rising middle classes were adopting and assimilating traditional structures because these were generally perceived as crystallizations of truth and beauty. Dealing with them on a modern level, negotiating a relationship between such durable values and newly emerging social modes, was considered as essential to the common good.

Be that as it may, I find it significant that in an official classification of 1815, the nobility came in first, followed by a variety of “middle-class” categories, the first of which was that of academics and professors, the last (or seventh) that of economic producers (Bruckmüller 1985). The *mediatory* role of cultural and intellectual pursuits on the ladder of upward mobility seems to be clearly and openly stated on such occasions. Even the much-debated role of a phenomenon like Freemasonry appears to make more historical sense and to find a fuller cultural justification when placed in this

family of circumstances. This role was not primarily politic (i.e., the engineering of socio-historical change through political means), but rather one of initiation through knowledge, the education of middle-class elites in processes of decision-making, the transfer from the mystical to the cognitive. In some ways, Freemasonry is another example of Mayer's "persistence of the old regime" in contriving to integrate emerging phenomena into a common value framework.

V

It cannot be denied that similar demonstrations are more difficult in the case of the broader population, i.e., of working people in urban and rural environments. Nonetheless, we do have plenty of evidence—sociological, as well as literary—indicating that the learning ethos had also largely permeated these strata of society, albeit more diffusely. The first point to be made has to do, of course, with the dramatic increase in literacy and participation in primary, secondary, and vocational education. Both private and governmental powers collaborated in this effort. Manufacturers had started vocational schools for orphans in Vienna and Klagenfurt in the early 1750s (Bruckmüller 1985: 266). The institution of *Hofbefreiung* (privileged taxation status) for Jews and all kinds of artisans and professionals was based, of course, on economic interest, but also on the recognition of competence (ibid.: 250–51).

Furthermore, a systematic (and sometimes painful) recycling of the religious class took place under Joseph II in particular, but also earlier. An estimated 700–800 monasteries were abolished in Austria, Hungary, and elsewhere in the Empire between 1783 and 1787. The clerics in question were reoriented towards practical issues: pastoral and social care, teaching, and "enlightenment." 3,200 new parishes were created (ibid.: 325–26) and the funds of lay religious brotherhoods were transferred to educational purposes. The sudden leap in general schooling was due in large part to this process of secularization or pragmatic reorientation of the church.

In Bohemia, the number of rural schools doubled from 1,200 to 2,400 in the 1780s alone; already in 1781 the number of children attending school had reached 42%. In Eastern Austria at the same

time, the figure stood between 33% and 70%, though it was much lower in mountainous Western Austria. The secularization of the Jesuit school model also meant a system whereby hierarchy by merit and arduous competition became institutionalized (*ibid.*: 275, 322–23). By the end of the nineteenth century, illiteracy was receding and on the way out in most parts of Central Europe. In Eastern Austria by 1857, less than 20% of youngsters of draft age were still illiterate. By 1900, illiteracy in Vienna had dwindled to 3%, a figure close to that of England, and considerably better than in, say, Italy or Portugal (Engelsing 1973: 96–99). By 1838, the percentage of school-going children had reached close to 99% in Vienna, and was thus higher than for Berlin at around the same time (W. Bauer in Zeman, ed. 1982: 382).

Against this background, it is significant to note the change in attitude of the peasantry itself, from frequent opposition to governmental intrusiveness and enlightenment “do-goodism” and a clinging to patriarchal modes of life, to a passionate embrace of the new possibilities for equalization or betterment (Csáky 1981: 206–09, as well as his conclusion on the homogenizing role of *educatio nationalis*, *ibid.*: 224–25, 230–31; also Engelsing 1973: 102 and Bruckmüller 1985: 274, 323). Numerous literary works in Romanian, Hungarian, Serbo-Croatian, and other languages describe the case of poor parents, usually peasants, who make every conceivable sacrifice in order to ensure the educational progress of their offspring.

One example among many is *Budulea Taichii* (“Daddy’s Budulea,” 1880) by I. Slavici (an author of Romanian Transylvanian descent), a short story that realistically presents the dialectic of education against a peasant background: encouragement, fear, and uncertainty. It relates the story of a gifted and hard-working peasant boy, Mihai (or Huțu) Budulea, who, by dint of scholastic achievements, steps up the social ladder and becomes first an elementary school teacher, then a seminarian, Episcopal bureaucrat and archivist, and finally, is groomed to become a bishop; joining the elite of Romanian, indeed, of Central European society as a whole, might not be a prize beyond his grasp. Slavici notes the gradual alienation of this up-and-coming young man who suddenly, however, changes and returns to his village to eventually become a *protopop* (an

Orthodox priest of a higher rank, equivalent to a *monsignor* in the Catholic hierarchy) and build a family.

Slavici's human ideal was the Transylvanian intellectual (teacher, pastor, lawyer) who, after serious studies in the world outside, returns to his native village and works there for the moral and economic enlightenment of his fellow countrymen. During Budulea's trek into the world of higher learning, his family and other villagers do periodically express the fear that they will lose him (linguistically, ethnically, socially), but hardly ever act in hostile or chauvinistic ways. They all agree that the main avenue to progress is *learning*, the acquisition of intellectual skills and higher degrees of knowledge. The fairness of this mechanism for advancement and the implicit equality of chances for betterment are unquestioningly accepted in *Budulea Taichii*. What is being questioned is the need for progress, or the degree of progress.

A kind of belated and nostalgically idealized image of this kind of learning ethos, synthetic and simplified, and yet, for that very reason, convincing and clear, is presented by Heimito von Doderer in his novel *Die Dämonen* (1956). A polyphonic and complex novel, placed in the 1920s, mostly in Vienna, *Die Dämonen* describes with both accuracy and sardonic humor the tensions, anxieties, and the pettiness of Central European society after World War I and the ways in which these inevitably feed into anarchic violence, revolution, and fascism.

One of the few figures to stand out from the teeming variety of characters is the young industrial worker Leonhard Kakabsa, an individualist driven by the sheer desire for knowledge and love of reading. One of the socially humblest figures in the novel, Kakabsa becomes a librarian to Prince Alfons Croix. The young prince, who is one of the most exalted (though secondary) characters in the book—seen as the embodiment of high moral and intellectual values, noble descent, and wealth—immediately recognizes in the self-taught industrial worker a kindred spirit and equal. To further emphasize this point, Leonhard is shown to fall in love with Mary K., a cultivated, middle-aged, middle-class woman, who is herself staging, by sheer indomitable will, a comeback from a crippling traffic accident. The novel by Doderer (begun in the 1930s) can be said to pinpoint very accurately the way in which an ethos becomes

retrospective myth: equalization and growth through cognitive development.

One final example of the extension of the Central European learning ethos into the broad masses of the population is provided by altered reading habits and the enormous extension of publications of all kinds. The evidence is abundant, and I will only cite a few instances.

The circulation figures reached by the large Viennese dailies in 1853 were slightly lower than that of their counterparts in London and Berlin (Engelsing 1973: 95; see also Pollak 1984: 61, 73); nevertheless, this indicated a spectacular achievement, particularly when correlated with the composition of the readership. *Neue Freie Presse* in 1873 had a significant number of subscribers from among artisans, domestic servants, and soldiers, along with the more predictable middle-class and professional readership (Engelsing 1973: 123). Around 1900, "in Budapest alone 21 daily papers were published averaging 400 printed pages and weekday circulation of one million" (Janos 1982: 102). In the whole of Habsburg Hungary, 150 newspapers in German were published, 44 in Romanian, 11 in Slovak, along with the majority of Hungarian-language publications (*ibid.*). Regular scholarly publications began to appear in Bohemia in the 1770s in German and Latin (Bosl, ed. 1979: 554–55) and soon thereafter in Czech. The circulation of schoolbooks in the Austrian half of the Habsburg monarchy reached up to 1.31 million in 1863 alone (639,000 of which were in German). These and other figures for the circulation of newspapers and books are comparable to those in Western Europe, a phenomenon that is remarkable, given the lower technological and socio-economic state of development of the East-Central European area.

There are two additional, somewhat more specific phenomena inside the world of reading and literacy that seem to me clearly connected with the mass appeal of the Central European learning ethos. One is the institution of the "reading cabinet" along with the reading club—institutions not unknown in the West, or without their equivalents there.³

Reading cabinets were set up in the Romanian Danubian Principalities in the early nineteenth century. They were well stocked with a variety of foreign books and had a broad readership. Over

and beyond the usual middle-class reading clubs and associations, there were *Lesevereine* in Vienna as early as 1848, one for printers' apprentices with 300 members, as well as two other similar organizations with 2,800 members (Engelsing 1973: 109). In Bohemia such societies for workers were equally numerous.

The second phenomenon is the reading of calendars and almanacs, which is a specifically nineteenth-century phenomenon, even though the genre is not entirely uncommon in either the eighteenth or the twentieth century. Almanacs and calendars provided a mixture of the scientific and the literary, the secular and the religious, and the practical and the entertaining that exactly filled the needs of a popular readership. Austria was superior to Prussia in terms of resort to this kind of reading material. Thus, in Prussia in 1853, the ratio was one published calendar copy per 16 inhabitants; in Austria it was one per eight inhabitants, close to the rate of France (Engelsing 1973: 118).

In my next section, I will try to briefly address the general cultural implications of these phenomena.

VI

Among the many relatively recent attempts at defining the common features of "Central European Culture" and providing a description of its common physiognomy we can mention those of Timothy Garton Ash, George Konrad, Milan Kundera, François Fejtö, George Steiner, following, for instance, the earlier and more scholarly works of William M. Johnston (1972) and (with much more limited and more precise purposes) Roger Bauer (1974). Pluralism, tolerance, organicism, the special relationship between East and West, are just a few among the numerous definitional features proposed. These are useful analytical categories, and they do not in the least contradict the considerations put forward here; to a certain extent, they combine and overlap with a pervasive ethos that can be encountered area-wide at all levels of society. It goes without saying that no single ethos can ever claim the full and total allegiance of all members of a society, particularly one so polymorphous, and with such a low definitional profile, as the Central European one.

Obviously, I do not mean to suggest that in this area mechanisms and features of socio-historical functioning generally encountered in Western societies were somehow suspended or negated. Class conflicts did exist, no less than the dilemmas of modernization, marginality, and dependency, and so did efforts to define an ethnic-national identity. (Nevertheless, we should also point out phenomena and trends such as “Austroslawismus” and “Bohemianism,” wherein cultural-intellectual elements overwhelmed direct ethnic affirmation or interest [see, e.g., Bosl, ed. 1979: 560–62, 637]). The presence of a strong and conscious option in favor of the socialization of cognitive search (that is, the search for knowledge, the accumulation of knowledge, and the acceptance of a hierarchy based on knowledge) qualified other historical realities, interacted with them, and contributed to their alteration in specific ways. It would take us too far afield to investigate each of these kinds of interactions in detail. Instead, I will focus on a number of discursive phenomena that might indicate the specific coloring and structuring of the cultural-intellectual universe in Central Europe.

The first group of phenomena involves the many different images that shaped social imagination in depth. They included the idyllic *topos* (Nemoianu 1978), the image of moderation, serenity, balance, harmony and interaction, and organicity reduced to scale. The credibility of an actual societal foundation for this discursive construct was enhanced in the environment of the kind of evolutionary order posited by the learning ethos. Other variants of harmony—religious, secular, even purely frivolous—were provided by the dramatic productions of the nineteenth century, from F. Raimund and J. Nestroy (Bauer 1974) to J. Strauss and F. Lehar. Still more powerful were the images of paternal and benevolent monarchs, their benignity actually enhanced by their ineffectiveness; constitutional restraints and the disappearance of absolutism liberated the monarch for milder pursuits.

In this area, Franz Joseph I (1848–1916) was the model of the exemplary monarch, who became a legend in his lifetime. He had enjoyed an exceptionally thorough education that included military science, astronomy, law, philosophy, political science, along with fencing, dance, music, and was topped off by extensive linguistic

studies (French, Czech, Hungarian, Polish, and Italian) (Bled 1987: 17–21, 118–19). More importantly, a lifetime of very orderly and conscientious labor, a self-positioning as an embodiment of duty, fairness, and punctuality, and the quality of *Anständigkeit* (decency, reliability, proper and correct behavior) all combined to constitute a powerful role model of the ruler as referee at different levels of social life (Reszler in Molnár, Reszler, eds. 1989: 144–56).

To move on to another discursive phenomenon, the images of pluralism and organicism found themselves creatively combined in the image of the federalist framework, which was (and remains) central to the area, whether as political reality, mere aspiration, or simply as the focus for a utopian value search. The history of plans to restructure the whole area by rationalist federalization according to ethnic boundaries—plans put forward by R. Palačský, K. Renner, A. C. Popovici, F. Naumann, among others—is very well known and has often been discussed (Wierer 1960; Nemoianu in Molnár, Reszler, eds. 1989: 31–41). Some of these plans were aimed only at the Habsburg Empire in its existing form; others were area-wide, that is, they specifically sought to attract and to combine outlying areas beyond the existing political borders.

In any case, it must not be forgotten that a kind of vaguer “federalism” was already inherent in the blueprint of the Habsburg lands, seen as congeries of overlapping sovereignties and autonomies (Csáky in Molnár, Reszler, eds. 1989: 19–29). In an even broader and deeper sense, federalism is tied in with the Central European learning ethos, the area of coincidence being the relationship between individual and community, or between local and general concerns. Any federalism is an arrangement intended to preserve particular identities within the overarching harmony of general interests. Much in the same way, the Central European learning ethos was trying to ensure affirmation of the individual person within a communitarian framework and orderly, prescribed structures. This logical-structural parallel led to the mutual reinforcement of federalism and the learning ethos.

A third discursive phenomenon was the prominence of didactic literature. Didacticism (a social posture of Biedermeier descent) permeated Central Europe. Everybody was teaching everybody, while enlightenment and awakening were considered the equiva-

lent of additional quantitative packets of information. This is testified to, among other things, by the enormous growth of popular learning-literature alluded to above (calendars, almanacs, etc.).

Another specific genre of half-literary, half-didactic writing was the *travelog* (Nast in Zeman, ed. 1982: 719–32 or Schmidt in *ibid.*: 668–69, to give just a few references to an enormous body of research on the topic), which provided geographical initiation, expansion of horizons, apprehension of a globalized horizon, and liberation from biological attachments. As a matter of fact, it may be said that historical novels acted in similar fashion, extending the reader's frame of reference and providing informational contexts for the present. The work of Walter Scott was, to be sure, of interest to the literatures of Western Europe, but its reception in Eastern and Central Europe (including Germany and Russia) was more intense and more influential in inducing the emergence of the local historical novel as a key vehicle for expressing ethnic identity. The historical genre, fictional or factual, could become a vehicle for national affirmation, for enacting the present, and for outlining the future, as well as being a didactic tool that combined the pragmatic and the pleasant.

As a matter of fact, this tenacious search for a blend of utility and entertainment was extremely widespread and rather typical. One case that deserves to be cited once again is that of the *tableaux vivants* which, from the salons of Vienna all the way to the provincial high schools of Southeastern Romania, witnessed great popularity. These were attempts to bring historical scenes to life, usually in imitation of famous large-scale paintings, contemporary or from the past. The *tableaux vivants* were less than historical plays, since there was no action or development, but they were considerably more than a mere masked ball: not amateurish and capricious, but held in rein by a given model and by the intention of meticulous reproduction. Instruction prevailed over diversion. A mixture of nobility, rich commoners, and (in some parts) even governmental agencies set up such *tableaux vivants* (Reissberger in Zeman, ed. 1982: 748–49, 759).

While this type of activity may be said to be a mere oddity—albeit a symptomatic one—it is squarely framed by a context in which the cultivation of the aesthetic (and, I venture to say, even aestheticism itself) was seen as a kind of shortcut towards a better and deeper

knowledge. Already some early Romantics (e.g., Novalis or Jean Paul) had outlined this idea, the suggestion that art was epistemologically momentous remained alive and well in Central Europe at least until the end of the nineteenth century. (The enormous success of the paintings of Hans Makart, with their mixture of the historical, the allegorical, and the fantastic, signals the same aesthetic/epistemological configuration; see, for example, Pollak 1984: 1957).

This “aesthetic knowledge” was, in a sense, an archaic-magic belief in the human capability to absorb *patterns* through behavior that would incline cognition to resonate with the rhythms of the universe. A propensity for reflecting the universe and internalizing it, the argument went, can always be educated into individuals, can become part of the human experience. Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Newman would have said the same. However, nobody was better at this game than Adalbert Stifter in his *Nachsommer* (1857).

Stifter chose a genre that was by then well established in European literature, the *Bildungsroman*, that is, a long narrative tracing the growth and evolution of a young man into full maturity. His characters are not described with particular depth or subtlety. This is because Stifter’s emphasis is on the progress of cognition itself, on advancement and growth. Many critics writing about *Nachsommer* have pointed out the utopian and retrospective nature of the “life as museum” portrayed in Freiherr von Risach’s *Rosenhaus* (Schorske 1981: 288–300). Others have emphasized that Risach’s real-life model (*Baumgartner*) rose from peasant’s son to imperial high office.

In the context of the present investigation, however, the most important feature of this novel is the smooth and logical cognitive transition from natural science—step by step, widening circle by widening circle—to a higher state of harmony and healing, and of culture of the soul (“seelische Kultur,” in Zeman, ed. 1982: 301–02). Heinrich Drendorf’s interests and knowledge thus shift gradually from botany and geology to carpentry and orchard cultivation, to the psychology of love and society. A framework—equally conservative and liberal—of spiritual ecology is outlined. Stifter’s ethos is one of progress by work. In the end, knowledge is transformed into beauty, Enlightenment ideals into a harmony of completeness.

VII

My first set of conclusions will be brief. A review of the facts leaves little doubt that an ethos of learning prevailed in Eastern and Central Europe. Each of its features—social reality or intellectual principle—can be found in other parts of the West and even, simultaneously or slightly later, in other parts of the world. A dramatic pressure towards the acquisition of knowledge has been building up consistently in the last two hundred years all over the world and has played an enormously important part in motivating social and individual action. This historical factor is—curiously enough—highly underestimated in most available historical explanations of the modern age.

Foregrounding the epistemological factor in *one* area of the world is intended as a signal of its functioning everywhere; it does not mean that it is absent anywhere else. The same is true of almost every other feature enumerated in this article: the role of the aesthetic, upward mobility, the recycling of aristocratic strata, the legitimation of the middle classes, the eradication of illiteracy, and so on. Both in the East and the West of Europe (e.g., France), in India, and in many other places, some or several of these features can be pointed out, and often they appear more prominently than in Central Europe. What counts, however, is their combination, the *figura* thus constituted. This undoubtedly endowed the Central European area with a number of peculiarities; among them, I believe, was a certain toning down of class conflicts.

Are we in a position to evaluate these peculiarities? Can we—retrospectively—judge them as relatively favorable or unfavorable in some developmental scheme? Such enterprises always produce questionable results. Many of the most endearing qualities of Central Europe—coziness and decency, legality and respect for intelligence among others—can be shown to be linked to the learning ethos. However, many of the area's most discouraging and backward features were also generated (in part or entirely) by it: slothful modernization, excessive nostalgia, deficiencies in the relationship to reality, and the chronic addiction to all kinds of retrograde populism are just some of those that acted as historical handicaps.

The political behavior of these learning classes was far from irreproachable, and any idealization would be unwarranted. The legacy, therefore, of this mode of acting was far from unambiguous. By the time of World War I, the Central European ethos was seriously eroded. It is doubtful whether in the 1920s and 1930s the *Kulturbürgertum* any longer performed a progressive, or even useful, role in most of Central Europe (or in Germany). Nationalism, fascism, and above all the long decades of Marxist-Leninist oppression, destroyed the efficacy of the ethos as a real social factor. Nevertheless, its historical role was something that could not be eroded. Not the ethos itself, but also the way in which it decisively shaped the historical memory and the actual makeup of the area's populations, still remain clear and, indeed, powerful realities.

At the same time, it is indispensable to point to the continued relevance of the Central European learning ethos in today's world. It had, for instance, a direct influence on attitudes inside American society through Central European (and in the first place Jewish) immigration. Many of these immigrants saw learning as the chief avenue to upward mobility; they also promoted an attitude of reverence for culture and science in society at large. More generally, recognizing the crystallization of a general epistemological human drive into a local ethos is, I think, of great interest. At the end of the twentieth century, definitions of the human (individuals, societies) as somehow informationally oriented are becoming more frequent. Whether these definitions are valid in any conclusive sense is hard to say and, ultimately, of only minor importance. Suffice it to say that they touch upon some central features of human existence in our day and that therefore a historical experiment of the recent past, such as the Central European learning ethos, must remain of primary interest.

VIII

One might hope that the preceding chapter would be self-explanatory. Nevertheless, a few additional explanations could be useful. We can approach a key question: What exactly is the weight and the interest of this geopolitical area examined here in a world that is becoming globalized? Clearly, as long as the planet was divided

into separate and somewhat isolated areas, East/Central Europe had its own identity, its own importance, its own interest, its own direction, and so on. However, as soon as the same region became part of the world at large, it lost, at least partially, this kind of importance and it had to justify itself in *different* ways—it had, and, unless it wants to disappear entirely, it has, to find a role for itself and to function in a special way. Additionally, I am trying not to lose sight of my general theme here: the value of the humanities, the manner in which the humanities (“secondary” as we called them in the beginning) are absolutely indispensable to a society of the future as it seems to be emerging and organizing itself in the coming decades, unless some kind of unexpected disaster stops this process and changes it altogether.

How can we combine these topics? I would suggest that we begin by stating that this whole area, East-Central Europe, is not an area of winners, but of losers, not one of historical triumph, but of defeat. A very short look at the past (and, in fact, at the present also!) can leave little doubt. If we draw a comparison with other parts of the world: with Italy and to Spain, creators of huge empires and cultures; with North-Western Europe, the motor behind the values and patterns organizing the world during the last 400 years or more, if we look at the historically enormous durability of the Chinese area, at the highs and lows of the Indian subcontinent, at the explosive growth of South America, at the slower but stubborn influence of the Eurasian landmass, the statement above becomes evident.

The conclusion is clear: Eastern and Central Europe were almost always the *object*, not the *subject* of historical evolution; the area’s ability to influence human events was almost always indirect and modest. The next question must be: Is there good reason for the inhabitants of this kind of present and the descendants of this kind of past to despair, or to be dejected, because of this state of things? In the light of our general argument, the answer has clearly to be negative. The attitude to be taken by those living in this world has to be one of reflective accommodation with one’s own present and past, as well as an adroit maneuvering inside the areas of human activity that are compatible with this present and this past.

How can this be achieved? Like everything else, first of all with as much lucidity and sincerity as humanly possible. This geo-his-

torical world abounds in victims; it also abounds in acts of malfeasance. Looking these squarely in the face can only have a salutary effect. Such an operation is somewhat painful, but it should not be too complicated. The next step requires a bit more sophistication. It involves essentially an insertion of the area under discussion into the global system that is slowly, conflictually, and, indeed uncertainly, now emerging.

There is an analogy here between the humanities and East-Central Europe. I have argued that the humanities (literature in special, the “secondary” in general) deal with the dimension of failure, of belatedness, of defeat, and of reaction in human existence. Literature, we suggested, is the science of the regressive. Such a science (or area of examination), I tried to underline, is absolutely necessary for a fully rounded and mature human existence. In a somewhat similar way, East-Central Europe has a history of failure, of modest or indirect initiatives, of lack of practicality, of peripheral functioning. It is therefore only natural that this family of nations, ethnicities, languages, and social constructs should have been particularly devoted to matters connected with the humanities over the centuries. It is only natural that it should have produced artists, thinkers, intellectuals and systems of philosophy, religion, and literature—achievements that usually came to be known too late by the wider world.

Nonetheless, we can notice a certain influence on the part of these humanistic achievements. This is reason for hope. As with the martial arts of the Orient, weakness may and ought to be transformed into strength. I will admit that I personally sometimes speculate with wistfulness and melancholy that, after their liberation from the communist yoke, most of the countries of Eastern Europe could have combined themselves into a Danubian Union, in amicable but loose connection with the already existing European Union, a federation that included only the Western part of this tiny but ambitious continent. I notice with interest how this idea seems to have been revived by those who nowadays talk about a “Europe with two speeds.”

For the time being, however, things can be taken as they are. We can ask ourselves: at bottom, what is the contribution of this part of the world to Europe first, then to the Atlantic community, and, ulti-

mately, to global society as it is emerging? Power? Hardly. Economic affluence? Any realistic observer will smile. Human experience? Much more likely, but of what kind? In my opinion, I will say with some confidence: precisely the experiential and empirical knowledge of imperfection and of defeat, the categorical rejection of utopian, triumphalist, and perfectionist temptations that seem to me the specialty of the West. East-Central Europe can inject into the worldwide conversation on the present, past and future a healthy dose of skepticism, a warning against expecting the absolute, a familiarity with failure. These are all matters of the highest importance—in fact precious gifts that should be received with gratitude by those to whom they are offered.

The *shape* under which these are offered is the idiom of the humanities: of literature and philosophy, of religion, and of the arts. Currently things are not going too well. The West is imposing its own values and rules of behavior upon its poorer neighbors with arrogance (not to say rudeness), haste, and much indifference to nuance. I am not saying that the values and behaviors in question are necessarily bad or undesirable. I do think, however, that they ought to be *translated* into forms of communication familiar to the receivers. I believe even more strongly that what should be engaged here is a genuine dialogue, a process of give-and-take that can take place only on a two-way street. It is *here* and now that the importance of the humanities becomes more important than elsewhere and at another point.

The very fact that the humanities cannot be easily and credibly quantified tells us much. It suggests the smoothing and pacifying effect they have, no matter how oblique, how modest, how imperfect, or how indirect it may be. It tells us something about the hospitality and inclusiveness of this particular human field. It also begins to tell us how East/Central Europe can be helped by others, and, perhaps even more importantly, how it can help others.⁴

Notes

1 In much of the Danubian basin, not only class barriers, but even gender handicaps could sometimes be overcome by means of access to learning. Thus women could be recognized as writers or scientists even when they had no electoral rights.

2 The multiple and polymorphous function of these voluntary associations is remarkable; it went from the provision of funeral insurance to bowling and feasting, to cultural issues (a subject to which I will return later), to openly political issues.

3 The first circulating library proper in the British Isles may be said to be the one established by Allen Ramsey in Edinburgh in 1725 (Altick 1957: 59); "book societies" or "book clubs" were set up at least as late as the early nineteenth century as "more or less informal organization(s) of middle-class families in a given neighborhood for the buying and exchange of books" (ibid.: 218). Broadly based attempts were made to establish village and "mechanics' institutes," lending libraries, and reading rooms. Nevertheless, both Thomas Carlyle in 1840 and an official and distinguished special committee of the House of Commons in 1849 declared the situation unsatisfactory in terms of the access of the working people to the world of reading (ibid.: 214–25).

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CHAPTER 5

LITERATURE AS ALLEGORY OF HUMAN PERSECUTION AND SURVIVAL

I

I will now introduce another relevant fact, which will strengthen the points I have already made. It is a fact that aesthetic imagination and literature in special have been regarded with doubt, in fact with hostility, by all kinds of regimes and systems over the centuries, as already alluded to in an earlier chapter. Even in Mediterranean Antiquity, attempts of this kind have been frequent, both theoretically and in political practice. In the Middle Ages, examples of massive pressure toward alignment and leveling are also abundant. The bourgeois and democratic states were more tolerant, but only apparently so: the lawsuits against Flaubert, Baudelaire, Wilde, the phenomena of self-censorship and of “political correctness” and many others, are sufficient to give us pause. The great totalitarian systems of the twentieth century (Nazi, Soviet, Maoist, and others) were extremely severe in their attempt to eradicate, or at least marginalize, aesthetic imagination and rein in literature. Why is this so? The answer to the question is, I think, quite relevant to our discussion here.

II

The Fascist and National Socialist regimes of the early century were by no means favorable to formalist aesthetics. The ideological authorities considered such positions static, not dynamic,¹ adversarial to the vitality of the conquest-directed future that was thought of in constructive or, more often, destructive ways. The banning and burning of “degenerate art” are all too well known. They clearly indicate that the *apolitical* nature of formalism was undesirable

under the given regimes. In both Germany and Italy, the artists more likely to think of themselves as allied with the regimes were turbulent expressionists or futurists, not neoclassical formalists. Even under the less ideological system managed by the military dictatorship of Romania in the 1940s, it was made quite clear to writers and artists that formalism was undesirable, if not forbidden outright, and that the authorities were not disposed to provide financial support for it. In Germany, “neutral” studies (even of the most innocuous kind) were frowned on. This attitude was not confined to contemporary creations, but was also extended to the canonical past.²

Fascist authorities, however, were inconsistent: on occasion they provided justifications or excuses for “great authors” of the past. Moreover, these authorities, like their Communist relatives at different points in time, sometimes condoned formalism as the lesser evil when allusional or allegorical opposition tended to emerge. It would take a great deal of empirical and statistical analysis to demonstrate it, but I am convinced that we are not far from the truth when we say that leniency toward formalism (certainly not approval of it!) was the exception, rather than the rule, under regimes of the far Right.

In any case, Soviet and Communist hostility was much more systematic against, and punitive of, formalism; it developed a full-fledged theory of its dangers for the happy future of humanity. The critical school of Russian formalism, perhaps one of the most typical cases, had by 1930 been virtually disbanded and erased from the country’s intellectual map.³ Some of its members (Jakobson) chose exile; others abandoned criticism for archives and literary science (Tomashevsky); others turned to writing “consumer” historical novels (Shklovsky).

The tragic irony is that most of these individuals had tried to collaborate with the Soviet regime, as can be seen particularly in Fritz Mierau’s collected volume on Lenin’s style—the counterpart to *I’ll Take My Stand*, by their southern U.S. formalist colleagues, if you will. Theirs was not, of course, an isolated case. Akhmatova, Tsvetayeva, and (in another field) Shostakovich had tried hard to strike a balance between formal beauty and “acceptable” content. The group of fiction writers (the “Serapion Brothers”) that included

Zamyatin, Pilnyak, Kaverin, Lunts, Zoshchenko, Pozner, and Slynimsky was disbanded with similar ruthlessness. (Zamyatin, like Jakobson defected to the West.) Nabokov had weighty socio-political reasons for fleeing his native country, and yet behind them always loomed a yearning for aesthetic purity and classical, serene beauty, the attainment of which Nabokov could not imagine under the Communist regime.

Such actions were replicated in dozens of small countries that had to take the Soviet Union as their model. One example among many is offered by the work of Robert Weimann, who tended to identify formalism with the advent and the aims of the extreme Right in the West.⁴ Weimann dealt mostly with Anglo-American, and to some extent with German and French, authors. Czech cultural authorities were no less leery of formalism, and in Romania short periods of permissiveness alternated with others of furious recrimination.⁵ The anti-aesthetism of Maoism surpassed all these cases.

It is interesting to bring up here, as a parenthesis, the case of Bakhtin, who, it is increasingly clear, was ideologically rather close to a conservative attitude. But precisely because he “felt himself guilty,” he was more cautious than some of the formalists. In the long run, of course, he was silenced like all the others who did not slavishly follow “orthodox” Marxism-Leninism. The acrobatic game Bakhtin played between sociological criticism and formalism may well serve as a parallel to the behaviors of some recent Western intellectuals.

Although we naturally tend to accuse dictatorial regimes of cruelly manipulating intellectual and literary study, the same is true (in subtler but no less effective ways) of Western and democratic societies. The important difference is that in these societies there are fewer tools of violence with which to punish ideological transgressions. Nevertheless, the examples come thick and fast, from the principles enunciated, and, ironically, the trials endured by Plato and some medieval and Protestant theologians to the “bourgeois” persecutions against Flaubert, Baudelaire, and Wilde. In the twentieth century this tradition is recognized in the repeated critical warnings and the huge pedagogical machineries used to blame, “explain,” or “vindicate” artists who, in the past as well as in the present, have not demonstrated an obvious social and political utility.

Thus, if we were to choose a particularly aggressive “antiformalism” inside Western or democratic societies, we could find no better example than “New Historicism” or “cultural materialism,” a relatively recent invention that incongruously combines the teachings of some post-Marxists (Gramsci, Raymond Williams, and, to a slightly smaller extent, the Frankfurt School of neo-Marxists) with the tenets of an outspoken rightist such as Nietzsche. New Historicism denies the existence of a human nature and essence and replaces them with negativity, conflict, adversary behavior, and, at bottom, hatred as the central value and ultimate motivation of human behavior. Any suggestion that serenity, graciousness, the gratuitous, leisure, or celebration might be part of human action or of the human soul (even an individual one) is angrily rejected. In this context, even progress is doubtful.

A serious examination of New Historicism and related movements, not to be undertaken here, would bring us closer to an answer. However, it is already clear that the dislike and fear of aesthetic formalism derive in all of these cases from a dislike and fear of complexity. Anti-reductionism is the great enemy of those who persecute aesthetic formalism, a topic to which I will return soon. By its nature, aesthetic writing incorporates complexity and multiplicity, “over-determination,” multidimensionality, the dialectics of harmony and contradictoriness, the coexistence of displeasure with the pleasures and hopes of beauty. Monolithic integrality, rigid logic, absolute consistency, homogeneity, and all their kin can never admit the manner in which aesthetic formalism challenges them by its very existence.

Even without enumerating or examining further cases, it is therefore obvious that such anti-formalist actions are indeed encountered on the right, on the left, and in the center. The common denominator seems to be the principle of utilitarianism, perhaps because it was a mode that easily grew inside societies that otherwise prided themselves on freedom and plurality, as well as in societies that openly proclaimed their “regenerating” purposes.

III

Many in the recent history of hostility to aesthetic formalism fit in with my narrative. One of them has to do with the parallel movements of New Criticism in America and T. S. Eliot's impact in England and on the Continent. Few who are in a hurry to blame both of them look either at the sources or (attentively) at the practices of the main characters in these movements and historical circumstances. Few are aware that the earliest New Critics (and to some extent Eliot also, but certainly I. A. Richards) resorted to formalism out of a desire to emulate the accomplishments and methods of the sciences. Their political and even their religious motives came in a remote second. They (like the Russian formalists and the proponents of related movements in Germany, France, Italy, and other European countries) simply tried to do in literature what was being done, to general praise, in other branches of human knowledge and activity. At the same time, their formalism was extremely moderate. Any honest reader of Brooks and Warren, or of Wellek and Warren, would have to admit that the priority they grant to literariness is constantly qualified by reminders of the auxiliary need for historical and linguistic knowledge.

A second focus that might be adduced here has to do with writers condemned as formalist, such as Willa Cather and Thornton Wilder. There is in their novels, no less than in many others', an earnest concern for existential issues: philosophy under the pressure of the concrete, the religious tenet surrounded by specific circumstances. This sustains a certain formalist discipline in their work insofar as the "bone structure" of their novels is more readily recognized, but only a superficial reader would overlook their substantial concerns.

A third, highly ironic, focus has to do with the "extreme-left aestheticism" that emerged at the end of the twentieth century. As the construction of Marxism-Leninism gradually revealed itself as untenable, and usually supportive of criminal practices, its theoretical apologists withdrew into an ivory tower. Increasingly, critical exercises of this sort became abstract and gained a gratuitous beauty as their practitioners separated themselves from a world that, all around them, was moving in ways opposed to their utopian vision

or, even worse, having nothing at all to do with it. Similarly, a good many “neohistorical” exercises are capricious, ingenious associations of quite different matters that do not contribute much to our knowledge, but instead may provide intellectual delight.⁶

A fourth state of affairs—perhaps, in the long run, the most dangerous for the adversaries of formalism—is the substantial philosophical defense of art set in motion by Pater and Wilde and continued by others, not least of all Harold Bloom a hundred years later (Bloom has referred several times to the “divine Oscar”). Despite their playful, sarcastic, “comedic” style of expression, Wilde and related writers were quite serious in proclaiming “Art” superior to “Life.” The sacrality they invested in art and its forms derived from Schopenhauer and Arnold (and from the Romantics earlier), but it was now proclaimed with earnestness and tenacity; it also evinced genuine opposition to certain aspects of social modernization (like capitalism). To the extent that hostility to aesthetic formalism is justified at all, it is primarily this (“armored”) mode that merits it.

The fifth case I would like to bring up deals with “moderate formalists,” theoreticians as different as Mikhail Bakhtin, Umberto Eco, Wolfgang Iser, Kenneth Burke, Frederick Turner, and others.⁷ All of these critics were aware of the fundamental importance of form, but for various reasons avoided both the radical aestheticism of Wilde and a commitment to the nonfigurative and nonharmonic position of twentieth-century high-culture modernism. In some cases (Bakhtin) the reasons were political persecution and wholly justified fear; in others (Iser) philosophical prudence may have played a role; Burke and Eco (if some judicious speculation may be allowed) probably did not want to separate themselves from the “interpretive communities” to which they prominently belonged.

Each critic, however, spoke strongly in favor of the *need* for aesthetics, the *need* for form, and the role of literary-artistic endeavor as “equipment for living.” Each believed that it was precisely the gratuitous (or asocial) character of aesthetic formalism that made it useful and, ultimately, indispensable to a fully realized human existence. The moderate formalists tried to act as a bridge between social utilitarianism and aesthetic formalism. Their project had only limited success, however, since the enemies of formal art could not

be easily appeased; ideological purity remained their intense concern, and they could not make concessions.

Why the tenacious opposition? A first useful explanation can be found in the theories of the political philosopher Michael Oakeshott. I refer primarily to a posthumously published work, written after World War II and finished, apparently, in 1952, in which Oakeshott offers formulations about the “politics of faith” and the “politics of skepticism” that guided his thinking from the 1930s to the 1980s.⁸ He has reservations concerning “rationalistic” policy that has been turned into ideology (as he recognized it in the work of Friedrich von Hayek),⁹ and he devotes many pages to the dangers of the “politics of skepticism” (e.g., 68–116). Nevertheless, it is clear, here as elsewhere, that Oakeshott’s sympathies lie on the other side, and his argument is a serious warning against the “politics of faith” which he sees spreading in the twentieth century, at almost every point on the political spectrum from left to right.

“In the politics of faith,” Oakeshott says, “governing is the minute and comprehensive control of all activities” (92). He envisions “a community organized expressly for the exclusion of vicissitude,” in which “the most minute and relentless control of all activities will be called for” (100). More specifically, “the enterprise of communism is to simplify not merely political activity, but all activity whatsoever; all problems are reduced to one problem... It is the ideal model of all simple styles of politics, and its pedigree may be traced back to the early projects of escape from complexity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries” (120). By way of contrast, Oakeshott sets up and praises “the great skeptical tradition”: Augustine, Pascal, Hobbes, Locke, Halifax, Hume, Burke, Paine, Bentham, Coleridge, Burckhardt, Tocqueville, Acton [129]).

The reason Oakeshott’s model of political analysis is attractive to me, and the reason I find it applicable to an examination of the synchronic aesthetic debates, lies in such key words as “escape from complexity” and “minute and relentless control.” It seems to me that hostility to the subtleties of formalist literary practice and critical analysis derives from this desperate yearning for simplicity. The hosts of form haters seek not to protect us from an excess of order (as they would have us believe), but to put all sectors of human activity and behavior, down to our smallest gestures, glances, and

innermost thoughts, under the control of a single purpose: a “perfection” that I, like Oakeshott, think ought to be placed between quotation marks. By contrast, the “perfection” pursued by aesthetic formalism is one of openness, a restoration of “the understanding of ...complexity” (128), “the faculty of not taking the words of our political vocabulary in their utmost extent” (123). In this context, aesthetic formalism would be a minimum of ruling necessary for the smooth functioning of a community. It is, at bottom, the realm of imperfection.

It is interesting to note that this minority view in aesthetics finds support, not only in some political modes of scrutiny (themselves minority and marginal), but also in religion and science. In the “cutting-edge” sciences recently, strict logic and rigid determinism have fallen from once absolute power. The laws and principles of Laplace and Newton, of Euclid and even Darwin, are nowadays regarded as governing specialized or local areas inside wider, “fuzzier” wholes. Microphysics speaks of the “freedom of will” of the tiniest units. Relativism and indeterminacy as formulated by Gödel, Heisenberg, Einstein, and Poincaré are given pride of place. The theories of chaos and complexity push things even farther. Studies on the “aesthetics of science” are frequent.¹⁰ The spiritual implications of “big bang” and other astrophysical theories have often been commented on.

It is appropriate to compare such renewed theories with trains of thought derived from religion. Major theologians find in aesthetic form sturdy allies and useful analogies. The names of Hans Urs von Balthasar in Catholicism and Emanuel Lévinas in Judaism come to mind, but there are many others.¹¹ The principle of subsidiarity, carefully shaped in papal encyclicals for almost one hundred years, is becoming a cornerstone of secular political theory and institution building.

Such analogies ought to give us pause: they are too striking to be dismissed as mere coincidences. On the contrary, they indicate mutually confirmatory patterns. Aesthetic forms appear spontaneously, not as a result of intentional rational-utilitarian maneuvers, in many parts of the universe and human society. That they can be subsequently used in one practical way or another is certain. Nevertheless, it is an error to regard them as deliberate, rather than as

unanticipated expressions of natural and social productivities, as ways in which things function ineluctably.

The ultimate question in connection with aesthetic formalism is probably the following: Is this mode of thinking similar to “the prison-house of language”? More clearly: must any vindication of it resort to some sort of utilitarianism? Is aesthetic formalism obliged to be socially useful? The question is more philosophical than literary-critical, and therefore must look back to its roots. I can think of two answers.

The first is a paradox. The attraction for coherence that makes formalism so suspect is more often recognizable among the adversaries of formalism. Indeed, formalism is a behavior that can be detected either among highly pluralistic forms of organization, or among those that assume a level of (an opening toward) transcendence. In both cases, coherence is shaky, even absent. In pluralistic or “multi-centered” groupings of matter or ideas, we can, and should, find room for various structures that provide form(s) and virtualities, even when they coexist with utilitarian, consumerist, purpose-oriented shapes. In a philosophical vision that will admit some (any!) kind of transcendence, aesthetic formalism might act as a link between the immanent and the transcendent. It might be, for example, a substitute for the latter; it might be one of its foreshadowings; it might mirror it (albeit in a cloudy way). In any event, the coherence sought by societies and their favorite (social) sciences diminishes or disappears.

My second answer has to do with the vexed question of “human nature.” I will not presume to solve it here; I can only say that we are in an either-or situation. Either something such as a human nature (or essence) exists, in which case aesthetic formalism is fully justified as an area in which exploration of and experimentation with human nature can take place; or human nature is a mere concoction (with ulterior motives), in which case aesthetic formalism is indeed undesirable, maleficent, intolerable. Yet, we may wonder if the evidence, such as we can deduce it from the history of literature, does not tend to justify the persistence of aesthetic formalism in one shape or another: narrativity, delight, love, play, gift, leisure.¹² A purely fluid view of the human species has to accommodate experimentation; moreover, it is founded on experimenta-

tion (self-interested or not). Formalism, willy-nilly, elbows its way into this multitude of efforts as a major “constructor” of social forms.

In sum, both the emergence of and the attraction for aesthetic form are continuous presences in literary and cultural history. The unyielding hostility to them is equally permanent; only its justification varies over the centuries. It may be religious, philosophical, ideological, racial, socio-economic, or otherwise. Almost inevitably, students of literature are obliged to choose one side or the other. The reasons that I incline toward the first, rather than the second, are as follows: (1) I believe that it is a matter of fair observation for the scientist, the philosopher, and the scholar in the humane sciences that form is a natural phenomenon, inscribed in the founding codes of all kinds of existence. (2) I believe that I can see in human history considerably more harm done by the attempt to erase form(s) than by their free flourishing. (3) Contrary to superficial impressions, the growth of form is compatible with, perhaps necessary to, plurality, skepticism, and the general freedom of existence, while its adversaries seek simplification, reduction, limitation, and control by all means. The condition they promote tends to diminish the potentialities of human society and growth. (4) The beautiful, in general, is not opposed to the true and the good; it is their indispensable companion.

IV

I dwelt upon the theories of Oakeshott (and upon a few additional analogies) in order to explain the attitudes of societies toward the aesthetic imagination. It is, however, only fair, in terms of the more general thematic framework of this book, to reach out toward the manner in which individuals and groups regard the discipline of defeat.

The career of Wystan Hugh Auden, one of the three or four truly great English poets of the twentieth century is divided into two clear stages. The British part of it, covering the “inter-war” period, was ideologically dominated by an inclination toward Marxist and Freudian ideas. This “British Auden” is followed by the “post-war”

or "American Auden," in which, more often than not, a Christian existentialism is prevalent. One of the key turning points, personally no less than historically, is represented by the justly famous elegiac poem "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," written upon the death of Auden's illustrious contemporary in 1939.

In one of the sections of the poem, Auden turns toward the role of the poet in general and urges that the writer do the following, particularly in the face of the multiple dangers or disasters: "Follow, poet, follow right/To the bottom of the night,/With your unconstraining voice/Still persuade us to rejoice;// With the farming of a verse/Make a vineyard of the curse,/Sing of human unsuccess/In a rapture of distress;// In the deserts of the heart/Let the healing fountain start,/In the prison of his days/ Teach the free man how to praise." These memorable lines demonstrate an enormous lucidity and an enviable depth of insight into the innermost truths of literature and of its social function.

With all its merits, this is not a unique statement. One can easily find in the writings of Czesław Miłosz, of Miguel de Unamuno, Joseph Pieper, or of Gilbert K. Chesterton, to take just a very few examples, observations in favor of memory as opposed to the present, observations that bolster the argument that literature is not, and in no sense can be, the handmaiden of current activities and concerns, but is, on the contrary, a kind of counterbalance, an attempt to place the present and its preoccupations in a better and more judicious perspective. Thus, for instance, Miłosz writes in one of his poems: "The true enemy of man is generalization./ The true enemy of man, so-called History,/ Attracts and terrifies with its plural number./ Don't believe it." Chesterton was probably the first to speak about recourse to tradition as a kind of "democracy of the dead," a phrase that is now widely used. And Unamuno once wrote: "the only reactionaries are those who find themselves at home in the present. Every supposed restoration of the past is a creation of the future, and if the past which it is sought to restore is a dream, something imperfectly known, so much the better."

It may seem almost incongruous to add that the avant-garde contemporary experimentalist novel-writer Michel Houellebecq is also among those who declare that literature is reactionary. I mention his name here only in order to illustrate how even trendy recent

figures often have an awareness of the true state of affairs in the world. As a matter of fact, it is not impossible to maintain that the whole of literature, from Aeschylus to Proust, is *primarily* about memory. Since the past is always what has already been defeated, or at least imperfectly achieved, this would be an overwhelming point in favor of our general thesis.

Obviously, what would come to the mind of many readers is that our narrative is valid for literary and artistic works that have a tragic or sad coloration, but not for those that are comic or jovial in tone. I do not think this is a solid argument at all. The truth is that the differences are simply formal, not to say superficial. A dramatic tragedy deals with the defeat of the good, or, at most, the defeat of the good that is more or less flawed. The winner is the equally good, but often not without defects. In a comedy it is quite rare to encounter virtuous perfection or flawlessness on either the side of the antagonist or that of the protagonist. The comedic conflict is almost always one between two kinds of imperfection, and victory is awarded to one of these imperfections. I admit that the subject is vast and its full demonstration would require perhaps a whole book, with many examples discussed in detail. I believe, however, that the result would be the same as the one summarized in this paragraph. My general argument as to the nature of literature would find itself strengthened, not weakened, at the end of the debate.

There is one last objection, the most general and most “philosophical,” that deserves some attention. It has to do with the need for optimism on the part of the human species as a whole. Without optimism, many would say, this species will not survive in the future and might not have survived in the past; therefore we ought to inhibit out of the most profound and noble self-interest the voices of pessimism, the preoccupation with defeat, even the recognition of imperfection. The odds are all too often stacked against us humans; why worsen an unhappy situation even further?

All this is probably true, but seriously incomplete. In reality, optimism is incomplete without a healthy dose of pessimism: it might lead us quickly to disaster and disappearance. It is only the contrastive energy of pessimism that allows optimism to function as driving force of the human race. Precisely the image of danger, precisely the retrospective yearning, precisely the concession of

defeat or of incomplete success, are what qualify optimism and turn it into a realistic and reliable depiction of the state of affairs in which we find ourselves. Without including the past, no future can be imagined, no present correctly understood. Without admissions of defeat and grieving or fretting over imperfection, we cannot achieve a state of truthful optimism. We are talking here not so much about a polarization, but rather about the cutting edge between the beneficial and the malignant, one that could not, and should not, be obfuscated or minimized. Absent the aesthetic imagination, we are in great danger of actually losing the very optimism we seem so eager to save.

I tried to prove that these are not merely abstract theoretical constructs in the three intermediary chapters: on the intersections of literature/religion, literature/history, and on the cultural and ethical specific experiences of Central Europe. One of these suggested how religious categories such as humility, fallenness, grace, tradition, Divine Providence, multiplicity and uniqueness, and the like find their equivalents in the world of the literary imagination. The two domains, each in highly different ways, indicate the relativity and incompleteness of human endeavor.

Another of the chapters tried to justify the interaction between fictional imagination, or empathy, and the stiffer, more pretentious historiographical discourses. They are mutually helpful, they lead to a more complete understanding of the world and of the past, they salvage the “secondary” (the multiplicity of the forgotten and of the eliminated), they convince us of the uncertainties of our understanding, while simultaneously encouraging us as to the possibility of reaching at least a degree of reliable truth and credibility.

The third of the three chapters speaks about the way in which one geo-historical experience among many (other kinds of experiences might be helpful in different ways, but perhaps guide us in the same direction) can actually and concretely enrich the landscape of a globalized humanity, how it can offer useful lessons to everybody else, how it can add an important dimension without which globalization might well prove undesirable in key ways.

V

It is of little use to repeat again that, in my opinion, the best way of understanding literature is to describe it as the field of human discourses that seems to concentrate on this phenomenon of existential defeat more systematically, attentively, and more meticulously, than other domains of human knowledge and activity. The last sentence in the previous section contains the term "globalization." In connection with it, we cannot avoid engaging an altogether fundamental question on a very *pragmatic* and topical level. Does literature argue that we must throw overboard as a failure the whole modernizing and globalizing enterprise? Or does the careful observation and study of literature, on the contrary, stimulate us to insist even more tenaciously toward its intensive implementation? As we have seen, neither of these two answers seems absurd, and in fact many individuals, institutions, doctrines, and governments seem to have dedicated themselves to one or the other of the two.

Obviously, I disagree with both. I am not ready to declare modernization bankrupt, nor am I ready to advocate a return to a more primitive, archaic, or traditional mode of existence and production. Neither am I convinced, on the other hand, that simply continuing blindly along current historical lines will be very satisfactory. Lastly, I am not in a position, here and now, to produce a program of answers and solutions that would reply to all these contentious and grating matters. I can, however, suggest with some energy a few lines of reflection and speculation that in the long run might lead to some outlines of satisfactory answers.

Basically, I would propose that we step back from the present situation and its topical pressures and take a hard look at the very *sources* of the Enlightenment modernization project. It is clear to me and, I think, to any objective and well-informed reader, that this project did not spring fully formed and well armed, like Athena from the head of Jupiter. It was, as a matter of fact, the result of much groping, hesitation, tentative modeling, speculative uncertainties, trial-and-error, and sometimes random growth. While some of its predecessors bear names like Bacon, Hobbes, Descartes, other roots of the Enlightenment can be found in the Late Middle Ages; other impacts came from immediate and material needs and socio-

economic changes, as well as from the enhancement of the informational flow.

I am particularly interested in a group or generation of thinkers who are usually described as post-Cartesian, and rightly so, because it is not easy for us to imagine them in the absence of the revolutionary rationalist changes mapped out by Descartes. These thinkers, often very different from each other, include major names: Leibniz, Pascal, Vico, Malebranche, Spinoza, Fénelon, and others. None of them rejected rationalism and progress. Almost all of them, however, tried very hard, each in their own way, to correct and to qualify what they saw as Cartesian radicalism. Their attempt was as often as not to build bridges between the incoming wave of thinking and of human existence (which they saluted or at least did not oppose) and the traditions of thinking of Antiquity and of the Middle Ages: Plato and Plotinus, Aristotle and Aquinas, and others. They believed that they were preparing an alternative kind of Enlightenment: one that should not be exclusively materialist and secularist, one that should not break entirely with the past and its traditions. They believed that their solution, or solutions, would be more *rounded*, more *comprehensive*, more *inclusive*.

As we know, their set of answers remained rather ephemeral, and was eventually avoided for other historical choices, those that were continued with implacable logic all the way to the present. (Here we immediately are led to think of our thematics of defeat and imperfection.) However, in trying to respond to the dilemmas of the present we could do much worse than to carefully examine their doctrines. A more modest, but a more complete vision of the Enlightenment, of modernization, and of globalization would reveal itself to us.

Notes

1 At random I will mention Oswald Manghin, *Geist und Blut: Grundsätzliches um Rasse, Sprache, Kultur und Volkstum* (Vienna: Schroll, 1934); Franz Koch, *Geschichte deutscher Dichtung* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1937); and the more substantial Josef Nadler, *Literaturgeschichte des deutschen Volkes: Dichtung und Schrifttum der deutschen Stämme und Landschaften*, 4 vols. (Berlin: Propyläen, 1938–41). The “Faustian” emphasis is typical. For a survey see Klaus Völker, *Faust, ein deutscher Mann: Die Geburt einer Legende und ihr Fortleben in den Köpfen* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1975); or, even better, Hans Schwerte, *Faust und das Faustische: Ein Kapitel deutscher Ideologie* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1962). Many materials, of course, were confined to journals such as *Geist und Zeit*.

2 The most typical, although crude, demonstration was provided by Georg von Lukács, *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1954). (A Hungarian edition appeared simultaneously; a modified three-volume German edition appeared in 1974.) My point is not that Romanticism was or was not a remote ancestor of different variants of nationalism (after all, in history such continuities are always true: everything influenced what followed it). The element of socio-literary “construction” is more important: Romanticism was actually preferred to neoclassical formalism in the Germany of the 1930s.

3 The story has been told more than once. See Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History, Doctrine* (The Hague: Mouton, 1955), 118–54.

4 Weimann, *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* (1962), developed completely in “New Criticism” und die Entwicklung bürgerlicher Literaturwissenschaft: *Geschichte und Kritik neuer Interpretationsmethoden*, rev. ed. (Munich: Beck, 1974). See also Weimann, *Structure and Society in Literary History: Studies in the History and Theory of Historical Criticism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976).

5 A typical case is that of the Romanian critic Ion Negoitescu, who was attacked in the officially controlled media repeatedly, beginning in 1958, for the crime of “aestheticism” (without political implications). From 1961 to 1964 he was imprisoned for, among other things, assembling an anthology that included banned poets. After his release he continued to be the object of persecution, in part because of his open homosexuality.

6 Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Richard Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991).

7 We might add Nicolai Hartmann, *Ästhetik* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1953); and Thomas G. Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986). The references alluded to in the text are numerous: P. N. Medvedev and M. M. Bakhtin, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*, trans. Albert J. Wehrle (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, trans. Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), containing essays from about 1919 to 1924; Eco, *The Role of the Read-*

er: *Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), and elsewhere; Wolfgang Iser, *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); Wolfgang Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology*, trans. (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1941); Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966); Frederick Turner, *Beauty: The Value of Values* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991).

8 Michael Oakeshott, *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Skepticism*, ed. Timothy Fuller (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996).

9 Friedrich von Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944).

10 See Judith Wechsler, ed., *On Aesthetics in Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978); Robert M. Augros and George Stanciu, *The New Story of Science: Mind and the Universe* (Lake Bluff, Ill.: Regnery Gateway, 1984); William R. Paulson, *The Noise of Culture: Literary Texts in a World of Information* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988); and Frederick Turner, *The Culture of Hope: A New Birth of the Classical Spirit* (New York: Free, 1995). The work in this direction is vast: let me drop, in a purely indicative sense, the names of Michel Serres, Katherine Hayles, H. Hawkins, René Thom, Ilya Prigogine, Humberto Maturana, and Francisco Varela.

11 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit: Eine theologische Ästhetik*, 3 vols. (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1961–68); Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, 4 vols. (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1973–83); Jean-Luc Marion, *L'Idole et la distance* (Paris: Grasset, 1977); Jean-Luc Marion, *Dieu sans l'être* (Paris: Fayard, 1984); Lévinas, *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l'extériorité* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1961); Levinas, *Noms propres* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1974). These works are just the tip of the iceberg; let me mention additionally the lucid and profound George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) and *ibid. Grammars of Creation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001).

12 See Joseph Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, trans. Alexander Dru (New York: Pantheon, 1952).

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The present book is inscribed in the age-old tradition of the defense and validation of aesthetic imagination, and of literature specifically. It argues in favor of the powerful need for literature in any society and human mode of organization worthy of this name. Literature is defined in a challenging way as the “science” of imperfection and defeat, or else as a type of discourse that deals with defeat, loss, uncertainty in social life, by contrast with virtually all disciplines (hard sciences or social sciences) that affirm certainties and wish to convince us of truths. If in real history most constructive attempts end up in failure, it follows that we ought to have also a field of research that examines this diversity of failures and disappointments, as well as the alternative options to historical evolution and progress. Thus literature serves an indispensable role: that of gleaning the abundance of past existence, the gratuitous and the rejected being placed here on an equal level with the useful and the successful.

This provocative and unusual approach is illustrated in chapters that deal with the dialectics between literary writing and such fields as historical writing, or religious discourses, and is also illustrated by the sociohistorical development of one geographical region, that of East-Central Europe. Literary and cultural examples are offered from both Western and Eastern Europe. Virgil Nemoianu’s book is an interesting and unexpected contribution. In a pre-vaillingly technological and practical age it argues for the continuing usefulness and necessity of humanistic values and concerns, for a complete grasp of our human environment, without illusions or double standards, for an understanding of the world in its roundedness, including full sympathy towards its own doubts and errors. The cultivation of literature is simply indispensable and without it, our present and future are difficult to imagine, the author says.

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